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Kuwait, Iraq clash at NAM talks in India

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Iraq and Kuwait clashed at a Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) ministerial conference here Monday during negotiations on United Nations reforms, diplomats said. Ministers from the two countries held up negotiations on proposals for the enlargement of the U.N. Security Council, they said. "We wanted a balanced draft but Kuwait insisted on the exclusion of our points from the proposed declaration," said Iraqi delegate Adnan Malik. Mr. Malik said Kuwait blocked Iraq when it called for the inclusion of a paragraph mentioning Iraqi prisoners of the 1991 Gulf war. "We had also asked for the inclusion of a reference to our appeals for an end to the sufferings of our people, but Kuwait tried to block those as well," he said.

Jordan Times

An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية تصدر بالانجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية «الرأي»

Kuwait bans anti-Israeli protest

KUWAIT CITY (AFP) — An unofficial group has been refused the right to protest outside the Kuwaiti parliament against Israeli actions in Jerusalem and U.S. support for the Jewish state's policies, an organizer said Monday. "We were refused the right to gather outside the parliament" on Tuesday, said Omran Mohammad, a founding member of the group calling itself the Committee for the Defence of Islamic Issues. He said the refusal from the capital government gave "no reason at all" for denying their right to peaceful protest outside the parliament building against Israel's decision to continue work on a new Jewish settlement in Jerusalem. The protest was also aimed at Washington for vetoing a United Nations resolution calling for Israel to reverse its settlement plans. "We believe this is our right as citizens of a free country to express our point of view," Mr. Mohammad said, but he said Kuwaitis would now be urged to gather inside the parliament building on Tuesday, when deputies meet for their regular debate.

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Netanyahu-Clinton talks produce no apparent breakthrough

Israel sticks to its guns over settlements; U.S. president cool to three-way summit proposal

Combined agency dispatches

U.S. PRESIDENT Bill Clinton on Monday assured Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that Israel would not have to compromise its "security" to restart Middle East peace talks and said the Palestinians are next in line for White House talks.

Mr. Clinton did not report any breakthroughs with Mr. Netanyahu after their two-hour talks on the Middle East peace process, which has run aground over hardening positions on both sides and an upsurge in violence.

"We had a very specific, frank, candid, and long talk, and now we're going to talk to the Palestinians and see whether there's something we can do to get this thing going again," Mr. Clinton told reporters.

A Palestinian National Authority (PNA) delegation is to meet at the White House later in the week with Mr. Clinton's Middle East point man, Dennis Ross, according to White House spokesman Michael McCurry.

Mr. Clinton had been expected to chide Mr. Netanyahu over the new Jewish settlement in the "Har Homa" settlement in Arab East Jerusalem.

But if there were any armistices, apparently it was ineffective as Mr. Netanyahu stuck to his guns on that and future settlements.

"The construction will carry on, whether it is the Har Homa suburb or in the territories" of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Mr. Netanyahu told Israeli journalists after his White House meeting.

No signs of softening appeared on the other side either as Palestinian President Yasser Arafat said in a speech in New Delhi that Israel's policies were "equal to a declaration of



Palestinian President Yasser Arafat is greeted by Indian Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda during a break in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) ministerial conference on Monday in New Delhi (AFP photo)

Arafat wins non-aligned backing in fight against Israeli settlement

NEW DELHI (Agencies) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat stole the limelight on the opening day of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) conference here Monday, accusing Israel of declaring war on the Palestinian people and the Middle East peace process.

His powerful speech, made ahead of crisis talks between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. President Bill Clinton in Washington on the peace process, won loud applause from delegates at the ministerial conference.

They responded by adopting a special declaration expressing solidarity with the Palestinian cause.

Mr. Arafat's address, included at the last moment after his late arrival as a

special guest, overshadowed a speech by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan backing NAM calls for U.N. reform.

Mr. Annan said later that a special session of the U.N. General Assembly might be called to discuss the Middle East.

Mr. Arafat, addressing foreign ministers from 74 countries, said Israeli settlements in Arab East Jerusalem were "equal to a declaration of war, not only on the Palestinian people but also on the peace process."

"The peace in the whole region is in danger. All this is a result on the continuity of the current Israeli government's policies and attitudes."

Mr. Arafat accused Israel of "intensifying, financing and supporting the Jewish

settlement activities spreading over the territories, particularly in holy Jerusalem, in order to Judaize it."

Mr. Arafat added Israel was "imposing an economic blockade" and wreaking havoc on the Palestinian economy.

He said there was "a strangulation and the restriction of movement of citizens, workers, goods and agricultural products from the areas of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and vice-versa."

"Israel wants to keep land, security and peace with us and with the Arab states for nothing."

"More than that, it wants to build relations with the Arab Nation and with the Non-Aligned Movement at our expense and at the

(Continued on page 7)

ROCHESTER (Agencies) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Sunday visited His Majesty King Hussein, who is convalescing at the Mayo Clinic following a successful operation for the removal of an enlarged portion of his prostate and reviewed Middle East developments.

At the 45-minute bedside meeting, the two leaders reviewed ways for breaking the deadlock in the peace negotiations.

Mr. Netanyahu wished the King speedy recovery.

Emerging from the meeting the Israeli prime minister did not reveal what he had discussed with the King but told a press conference: "I just had the opportunity to visit King Hussein, who is recovering from a medical treatment. I was impressed by his recovering very rapidly and I wished him full recovery."

He said that at his meeting with U.S. President Bill Clinton on Monday he was to discuss ways for moving the peace process forward.

Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali, who was present at the meeting, said: "I think the visit of Mr. Netanyahu is well appreciated by His Majesty and it is another gesture. I hope



Prime Minister Abdul Salam Al Majali chats with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a press briefing at the Rochester Methodist Hospital in Rochester, Minnesota on Monday (Reuters photo)

that this contact will be for the good of everybody."

Mr. Netanyahu flew directly from Tel Aviv to the clinic Sunday for the visit with King Hussein who had prostate surgery on Saturday.

"The relations between Israel and Jordan are important. They reflect one of the foundations of the peace that we have in our area that we seek to

expand," Mr. Netanyahu said after the meeting.

Israeli officials characterized the meeting with the King as a gesture of friendship.

"I was impressed that he's recovering very rapidly," Mr. Netanyahu told reporters. "I wish him a full recovery. He is a great friend of Israel and a great friend of peace. I think that I am expressing here the

hopes the people of Israel and the people of goodwill everywhere."

Mr. Netanyahu, who did not take questions at a brief news conference, said he will talk to President Clinton on Monday "about the efforts to bring stability, end violence and move the peace process forward."

"This is a wish that I'm (Continued on page 7)

Archaeology proves Islam's tolerance — Crown Prince

AMMAN (Petra) — His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, said Monday that the discovery of churches that existed in Jordan in the Muslim Umayyad era

"show that the essence of Islam was distinguished by a broad liberal attitude and an openness of mind which shunned narrow sectarianism and religious bigotry."

In an address delivered on his behalf by Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Akel Biltaji at the opening of a colloquium entitled "Travelling Through the Byzantine Umayyad Period," the Regent said: "Archaeological research in the last 15 years has shown that no less than 46 Byzantine churches in Jordan alone continued to be

used as such, well until the middle of the 8th century and beyond, and no fewer than five churches were constructed and paved with coloured mosaics in the Umayyad period."

"These discoveries also convey a picture which is drastically different from that which portray Islam as a fanatic and intolerant creed that utterly rejects the others," added the Regent, noting that in Jordan "we have been promoting interfaith dialogue and intercultural debate because we are convinced that only through understanding and tolerating differences, the three monotheistic faiths can offer hope of a better future."

(Continued on page 7)

Abbas briefs Crown Prince on PNA's stand on crisis

AMMAN (Petra) — His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, on Monday stressed the need for bolstering channels of communication between Jordan and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and putting into practice Jordanian-Palestinian agreements in political and economic fields in such a manner that would benefit the two peoples.

Speaking at a meeting with Mahmoud Abbas, Secretary General of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), the Regent said that Jordanian-Palestinian coordination would lend support to the Palestinian negotiators in their quest to regain the legiti-

mate and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Stressing the importance of achieving security in its comprehensive dimension covering social and economic security, the Regent emphasised Jordan's support for the Palestinian people's right to lead a dignified life on their national soil. He also emphasised the need for the resumption of the peace process until it achieves the aspired comprehensive peace that would guarantee the rights of all parties and restore Palestinian people's legitimate rights.

Mr. Abbas briefed the Regent on the PNA's stand regarding the recent developments, stressing that the

(Continued on page 7)

Israeli settler opens fire, wounds two Palestinians

RAMALLAH (Agencies) — A Jewish settler opened fire on Palestinians from his M-16 assault rifle Monday after his van was stoned in a West Bank village, witnesses said. Two Palestinians were wounded, one seriously.

In a second incident in the West Bank town of Hebron, a Jewish settler shot in the air after he said Palestinians threw stones at him near the Ibrahim Mosque. No one was hurt.

The clash in the West Bank village of Kharbata occurred at about 9 a.m. (0600 GMT) when a Jewish settler drove through the village and school students stoned his van, said Jamil Injias, 28, a village resident.

The settler got out of his vehicle, chased the youths and opened fire from his M-16 assault rifle, Mr. Injias said. When other villagers saw that the children were being fired on, they threw more stones at the van, and the settler turned around and shot at them as well, Mr. Injias said.

As a result, 18-year-old Iyad Hamoud was shot in the chest and 27-year-old Jamal Ibrahim hit in the leg. The wounded were taken to a hospital in Ramallah, 15 kilometres away. Mr. Hamoud was in serious condition, doctors said.

The settler was known in the village, and in the past tried to intimidate villagers by driving up to them with his guns visible, said Mr. Ibrahim as he recovered from his leg wound at the hospital.

"He passes through the village all the time even though there is a bypass road (for settlers)," Mr. Ibrahim said. "He got out of his van and began shooting. He had an M-16, and a handgun he held in his mouth while shooting."

In the Hebron incident, no one was hurt by the settler's shots. Israel Radio said the settler was detained by police for questioning.

The West Bank and Gaza Strip have been rocked by daily unrest since Israel broke ground on March 18 for a Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem.

Three Palestinians have been killed by Israeli gunfire and scores wound in the violence.

Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, who returned on Sunday from talks with top U.S. officials in Washington, said a closure which Israel tightened in the West Bank and Gaza after a March 21 suicide bombing in Tel Aviv would continue.

"Closure is not a goal but a means... It is entirely clear to

us that the fact of closure raises the level of violence — stone-throwing and petrol bombs — in the territories of Judea, Samaria (West Bank) and Gaza," Mr. Mordechai told reporters.

Some 140,000 Jewish settlers live amidst more than two million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

Officials said Mr. Mordechai decided to maintain the restrictions on Palestinians' right to travel outside the territories because Palestinian National Authority (PNA) "is still not doing enough to fight terrorism."

Mr. Mordechai also ordered Israel's armed forces to remain on high alert amid fears that militants from the territories could attempt new suicide bombings to coincide with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Washington.

Mr. Mordechai acknowledged in a radio interview Monday that economic hardship caused by the closure "fuels violence in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, but our top priority is fighting terrorism."

The travel restrictions prevent tens of thousands of Palestinians from reaching day jobs inside Israel and severely cuts down trade with the territories.

Hariri urges more Russian involvement

MOSCOW (R) — Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al Hariri urged Moscow on Monday to play a more active role in the Middle East settlement after tension prompted by Israel's plans to build Jewish settlements in Arab East Jerusalem.

"I urged my Russian counterpart to have Russia do all it can to give a new impetus to the peace talks," Mr. Hariri said after talks with Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov. Mr. Hariri told a joint news conference that he and Mr. Primakov expressed similar views that the Middle East settlement should be achieved solely through political measures. "Israel should carry out all decisions taken by the United Nations Security Council and its obligations under the international treaties," he added.

Mr. Primakov told the news conference that he will raise the issue during his talks with French President Jacques Chirac during his visit to Paris later this week. He also said that his deputy, Vasily Posuvalyuk, will leave for the Middle East in the next few days. Mr. Primakov said he is in person-

(Continued on page 7)

Party merger of eight expected to challenge Islamic Action Front

By Francesca Ciriaci
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The National Constitutional Party, newly formed by the merger of eight centrist parties, will announce its statute soon and will field candidates in a unified list for this autumn's parliamentary elections, a party source said on Monday.

Combining the human, ideological and financial resources of one large and other smaller parties, the new nationalist centrist bloc is widely expected to challenge the Islamic Action Front, so far the largest political party in the Kingdom.

The secretary general of Al Wa'ed, one of the merging parties, Anis Muasher, said in the parliamentary elections the new party counts on the votes of "the majority of the people, who reject extremism... and believe in an open economic strategy which will bring Jordan in the club of the developed countries."

According to Mr. Muasher, who is also a prominent businessman and former minister of finance, the National Constitutional Party hopes to obtain official registration at the Ministry of

Interior in May. "There should be no obstacles to the registration procedures," he told the Jordan Times in an interview, adding that each of the eight parties will choose 100 members to sign the application.

Mr. Muasher also confirmed earlier reports that, after the official registration, the leaders of the previous parties will resign to make way for a new unified leadership.

Though it is yet unclear when the internal elections for the new leadership will be held, Mr. Muasher said "there will be an interim period in which the leaders of each party will form an executive committee and appoint 30 members to take part in a central council."

The National Constitutional Party will emphasise economic reforms, Mr. Muasher said, including "the privatisation and liberalisation process and all the economic reforms that have been promised by governments, but never realised."

He announced that the new party will also present an economic plan, and suggest the methods for its implementation. The economic plan should be publicised "in the early days of the

THE EIGHT centrist nationalist political parties which have announced their merger as the National Constitutional Party are:

- The Progress and Justice Party, headed by Ali Sa'ad
- Al Ahd, headed by Abdul Hadi Majali
- Al Wa'ed, headed by Anis Muasher
- The Jordanian National Alliance, headed by Minister of Agriculture Mijhem Khreisha
- Al Watan, headed by Hakam Khair
- The Jordanian Arab Masses Party, headed by Abdul Khaleq Shataat
- Al Yakatha, headed by Abdul Ra'uf Rawabdeh
- The Popular Unity Party, headed by Talal Ramahi.

party," he added.

In addition to the economic reforms, the National Constitutional Party will also focus, in the parliamentary elec-

(Continued on page 7)

Ex-owner of Jabal Abu Ghneim land fights construction

TEL AVIV (AP) — The last legal hurdle Israel faces over its controversial construction in Arab East Jerusalem is from the Jewish owner of much of the land confiscated for the project.

David Mir is petitioning the supreme court to cancel the confiscations, and if that fails he has a quirky plan for embarrassing the government: retroactively selling rights to the land to area Palestinians who would then negotiate the compensation.

"This is my illness: I am an optimist," Mr. Mir said Sunday, clad in a brown leather jacket as he watched busy construction crews on the Windswept hill.

The real estate developer said that before the confiscation four years ago, he owned about 140 acres on Jabal Abu Ghneim; that is almost a third of the land on which the "Har Homa" settlement project is to be built.

Groundbreaking last month for the project drew international condemnation and set off almost daily Palestinian protests and a deep crisis in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

"I have the solution: cancel the confiscation," the balding, gray-haired Mir told the AP. "I want to develop (the site) in peace with our neighbours. Under the law I am considered the owner until I am paid compensation."

On Tuesday the supreme court is to hear Mr. Mir's argument that it was unfair to take the land away from him — which he says scuttled his plans to build a mixed Arab-Jewish neighbourhood — and give it to another contractor who is

to build for Jews only.

It is not clear, however, whether Mr. Mir will find takers for his fallback plan — because Palestinians generally refuse to accept compensation for land for fear of granting confiscations legitimacy.

The real estate developer, who says he is motivated by a desire for peace as much as money, met with prospective takers on the hill. It was not clear how much he was asking for.

Ali Hassan Abu Tier, an elderly Arab man dressed in a suit and tie and Keffiyeh, hugged Mr. Mir and seemed happy to talk. But he did not go along with Mr. Mir's plan.

"We refuse to accept compensation," he said. "Is this justice?"

Mr. Mir's effort to sell the confiscated land with the argument that he has not been compensated yet appears unprecedented, and there was doubt whether it would hold up in court.

"He has nothing to sell. It (the land) belongs to the state," said Interior Minister Eli Shoua.

David Zeiderman of the IR Shaleva peace group that has fought the Har Homa project found himself in rare agreement with Mr. Shoua.

Asked if Mr. Mir had the right to sell the land, Mr. Zeiderman said: "Not really. He is basically trying to take the wind of sails of government's claim" that two-thirds of the land confiscated for Har Homa was taken from Jews, not Arabs.

In the past, the supreme court has rejected appeals against the confiscation or to order a halt to the Har Homa construction.



A Palestinian youth is brought into a hospital in Ramallah on Monday, after he received gunshot wounds when an Israeli settler opened fire on stone-throwing Palestinians in the village of Kharbata, 20 km east of Ramallah (AFP photo)

Qadhafi calls for action, not words

CAIRO (AP) — Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Qadhafi on Sunday urged Arabs to quit talking about Jerusalem and do something about it.

In a speech at Al Fath University in the Libyan capital Tripoli, Colonel Qadhafi said the Arab World must counter Israeli moves in Arab East Jerusalem.

Israel's decision last month to build a new Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem has drawn strong criticism from the Arab League, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the OIC's Jerusalem Committee.

"The Zionist movement in East Jerusalem must be confronted by an Arab counter-movement to occupy East Jerusalem and deny any Zionist entry," Col. Qadhafi told a rally of university students. "It is not through paper resolutions."

He chided those countries that have tried to develop relations with Israel, saying, "We must expose the stupidity of the Arab economic and political approaches because it is part of the deteriorating, decaying and immoral international approach."

His speech was carried on state-run Libyan television and monitored by the Associated Press in Cairo.

Egypt and Jordan have signed peace treaties with Israel, while the Palestinians have negotiated several agreements that are designed to lead to a "final status" agreement.

A number of Arab countries — Qatar, Oman, Morocco and Tunisia — have established low-level trade or diplomatic relations, but these have been set back since the elec-

tion last May of hardline Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Col. Qadhafi called on the students to adopt strong resolutions and follow them up with action.

"We should expose the stupidity of the current Arab approach, the approach of mere rhetoric, the approach of mere ink on paper, the approach of denunciations and empty protests without action on the ground," Col. Qadhafi said.

He did not, however, recommend any specific action to be taken.

His speech was interrupted frequently with student chants, including shouts of "We are behind the revolution."

Col. Qadhafi also told the students that Arabs hate the United States "because it has declared itself our enemy."

He added: "America is the one which is waging war against us. It is the one which wants to enable the Zionists to control the Arab World."

In a speech last month, Col. Qadhafi said that Mr. Netanyahu's policies give the Arabs no alternative but to go to war to liberate their land from the Jewish state. He specifically mentioned Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, which Israel seized from Syria in the 1967 Middle East war.

Youths arrested after plotting an attack on Israeli embassy

By Rana Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Security forces are questioning a number of youths in connection with an attempted attack against the Israeli embassy in Amman, official sources said Monday.

Report of the arrests surfaced in two weekly tabloids this week, and they were subsequently confirmed by the families of the youths, who range in age between 16 and 17.

Up to 11 students from the Arab Modern School (AMS) were detained for questioning, the reports said.

No formal charges have been made against the 11 students, but it is understood that they are being questioned on forming an organised group, plotting to attack the Israeli embassy, and distributing dangerous pamphlets in Amman and Irbid.

Three of the eleven have been released, informed sources told the Jordan Times.

Other sources indicated that the number of students detained was 14.

Security forces contacted by the Jordan Times on Monday evening declined comment.

But a police source confirmed that the youths were being detained in a juvenile

cell in Al Zohour police station.

"We were awakened after dawn on Wednesday by police officers asking for our child," said Sa'ed Kayed, father of 16-year-old Abdul Rahman, who is still being detained. "And since then, none of the parents or lawyers were allowed to see the children," Mr. Kayed, an attorney, said.

According to Mr. Kayed, police started arresting youths following an attempt made by three of his son's friends (to attack the Israeli embassy, the youth were carrying tyres and kerosene) on Wednesday.

"Following their arrest, the three informed the authorities of the names of their other friends," Mr. Kayed said.

Last month, police sources announced that an Israeli embassy car was attacked in front of the ambassador's house in Sweifeh.

The car's windows were broken and its tyres were punctured. Police ruled out theft as a motive.

This was the first known incident to occur since Israel opened an embassy in Jordan after the signing of the peace process between the two countries in 1994.

Released German tourists do more Yemen sightseeing

SANAA (AFP) — Four German tourists freed after being held by tribesmen in Yemen for nearly two weeks continued their sightseeing on Monday before heading home, officials said.

"They were well treated and went to tour old Sanaa before returning to Germany tonight aboard a scheduled flight," a senior Yemeni official said.

The two German couples freed by Yemeni security forces on Sunday were abducted on March 27 after touring ruins in Barakesh, 200 kilometres east of the capital Sanaa, despite government orders that tourists should only go to the area with an armed escort.

Tribal sources said the hostages were freed after the authorities stepped up a stranglehold on the mountain village of Al Mahjaza where they were being held by members of the Jihm tribe.

They said security forces fired several mortar rounds and anti-tank rockets near the kidnappers' hideout late Saturday, without causing any casualties.

Travel agency officials who organised the tour for the Germans said they were well treated by the tribesmen, who sacrificed a lamb in their honour.

The captors immediately surrendered without a fight on Sunday, and eight of them were arrested, after security

services marched towards the hideout, the sources said.

More than 80 foreigners have been kidnapped by notoriously unruly Yemeni tribes since 1993 and all have been freed unharmed. They are usually used as bargaining chips to obtain concessions from the government.

The army has only rarely been used in rescue operations — most recently in January 1996 when 17 French tourists were freed, also from Maarib.

Yemeni officials said the kidnappers were apparently demanding from the government a share of international aid provided after floods in the region last year.

The kidnapping was the third of foreigners in Yemen in as many months.

In March, seven German motorcycle tourists were kidnapped by tribesmen near Tarim, 750 kilometres east of Sanaa, and held for 10 days.

A month earlier a U.S. oil company engineer spent 17 days in captivity in eastern Yemen.

Yemeni officials have suggested in private that Saudi Arabia could be behind the recent spate of kidnappings to destabilise its neighbour ahead of April 27 elections.

Tourism is a vital source of foreign currency to Yemen, which is one of the poorest countries in the world.

Turkish general says army is not interested in power

ANKARA (R) — The Turkish army's second-in-command said in comments published on Monday that the military did not want a greater role in politics, despite ordering the government to crack down on Islamist activism.

"It is not our duty or mission to run the country," the Milliyet daily quoted General Cevik Bir as saying. "Both the country and the world would not favour that."

A military-dominated security council in February told Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan's coalition to reverse steps to increase the role of religion in public life.

But Gen. Bir said the secularist generals, who have carried out three coups since 1960,

would go no further than "advising" the civilian authorities. "There is no way we will be involved in any other kind of intervention," he said.

His comments were the most definitive so far by senior Turkish generals to rule out direct military intervention in the political sphere.

Mr. Erbakan, Turkey's first Islamist prime minister, has yet to enforce the crackdown, which includes planned restrictions on religious education and the Islamist media and business.

"It will take time to put (the measures) into place but they will be carried out," Gen. Bir said.

Iran to sue 24 German firms over Iraq chemicals

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran said Monday it was preparing to sue 24 German companies for providing Iraq with chemical weapons or technology during its 1980-1983 war against the Islamic republic.

Mohammad-Reza Abbasi-Fard, the deputy-head of the judiciary for executive affairs, said the defendants would be called to appear in a Tehran court shortly, but did not give a date.

Quoted by Iran's official IRNA news agency, he named some of the firms implicated as Karl Kolb, Pilot Plant, Rayem Bayern and Laiziki. They are a phonetic translation of names as written in Farsi.

The official said more than 1,000 relatives of the victims of chemical attacks during the war had filed complaints against the German firms for giving Iraq "chemical weapons, poisonous gas or

the technological knowhow for producing such arms."

They also were suing "certain" German officials for issuing permits to the firms to export such deadly devices, he said, adding that the plaintiffs had demanded "material and moral" compensation as well as punishment for the alleged culprits.

Mr. Abbasi-Fard argued that the "crime" had taken place inside Iranian territory and that the authorities here had jurisdiction over the case.

"We have completed investigations into the case and have strong and unshakeable evidence, including pictures and films showing German specialists in special uniforms cooperating with the Iraqi army," he said.

His remarks came as a Berlin court prepares to issue a verdict on Thursday in the murder trial of four Iranian Kurdish opposition figures in

which Iranian leaders have been implicated.

Relations between Iran and its main trade partner, Germany, have been strained over the trial of an Iranian and four Lebanese nationals accused of gunning down the Kurds in a Berlin restaurant in 1992.

Iran first threatened to sue the German companies over alleged chemical aid to Iraq last November after German prosecutors accused Iranian leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani of approving the assassinations.

Bonn has acknowledged that German companies were involved in building chemical plants in Iraq in the early 1980s but says the assistance was intended for agricultural purposes, although the factories were later modified by Baghdad to produce material for military use.

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PROGRAMME TWO

14:05 Cartoon — Bugle-The Little Helicopter
14:30 Grimmy
15:00 French Programmes
16:00 Super Sports Follies
16:30 Dog House
17:00 Preserving for the Taste of it
17:15 The Album Show
18:00 French Programmes
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 Comedy — The Office
20:00 Superstars of Action
20:30 Encounter
21:10 The Nature of Things
22:00 News in English
22:25 Snowy River
23:00 Mission Impossible

PRAYER TIMES

04:52 Fajr
06:12 (Sunrise) Duha
12:38 Dhuhr
16:12 Asr
19:04 Maghreb
20:23 Isha

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St. Joseph Church Tel. 634590
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440
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English-speaking

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WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology
Successive cold air fronts will affect the Kingdom today and last until Thursday. It will be rainy, cold, with skies cloudy to partly cloudy and winds southerly to northwesterly moderate to active. In Aqaba, it will dusty, winds southerly moderate

to active, and seas rough.

Amman 05/12

Aqaba 14/25

Deserts 05/18

Jordan Valley 12/23

Yesterday's high temperatures:

Amman 10, Aqaba 25 Humid-

ity readings: Amman 79 per

cent, Aqaba 35 per cent.

USEFUL

TELEPHONE

NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Bassam Karadseh 799300

Dr. Ramzi Mazzawi 894788

Dr. Khalid Abdo 657129

Ferdows pharmacy 778336

Al Asema pharmacy 637055

Al Salam pharmacy 636730

Yacoub pharmacy 644945

Shmeisani pharmacy 637660

Nairoukh pharmacy 623672

Najib pharmacy 847632

IRBID:

Dr. Gazi Ta'ameh 250080

ZARQA:

Dr. Samir Al Lawzi 989601

Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111

Civil Defence Dept. 661111

Civil Defence Immediate Resc-

ue 630341

Civil Defence Emergency 199

Rescue Police 192 621111

637777

Fire Brigade 617101

Blood Bank 775121

Highway Police 843402

Traffic Police 896390

Public Security Department

..... 630321

Hotel Complaints 605800

Price Complaints 661176

Water and Sewerage Com-

plaints 897467

Amman Municipality Com-

plaints 787111

Telephone Information (direc-

tory assistance) 121

Overseas Calls 010230

Central Amman Telephone

Reparis 623101

Abdali Telephone Repairs

..... 815615

Jordan Television 773111

Radio Jordan 774111

Water Authority 680100

Jordan Electricity Authority

..... 815615

Electric Power Company

..... 636381

RJ Flight Information

0853200

Queen Alia Intl. Airport 08-

53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:

Hussein Medical Centre

813813/32

Khalidi Maternity 644281/6

Akileh Maternity 642441/2

Jabal Amman Maternity

..... 642362

Malhas, J. Amman 636140

Palestine, Shmeisani 607071

Shmeisani Hospital 669131

University Hospital 845845

Al-Muasher Hospital 66727/9

The Islamic, Abdali 666126/7

Al-Ahli, Abdali 664164/6

Italian, Al-Muhajreen 777101/3

Al-Bashir 775111/26

Army, Marka 891611/15

Queen Alia Hospital

602240/50

Amal Hospital 674155

U.N. chief's call on Albania cheers Italy's Prodi

ROME (R) — Prime Minister Romano Prodi Monday welcomed a call from U.N. Chief Kofi Annan for rapid deployment of a multinational force in Albania as he raced to end a row with a hard left ally over Italy's plans to lead it.

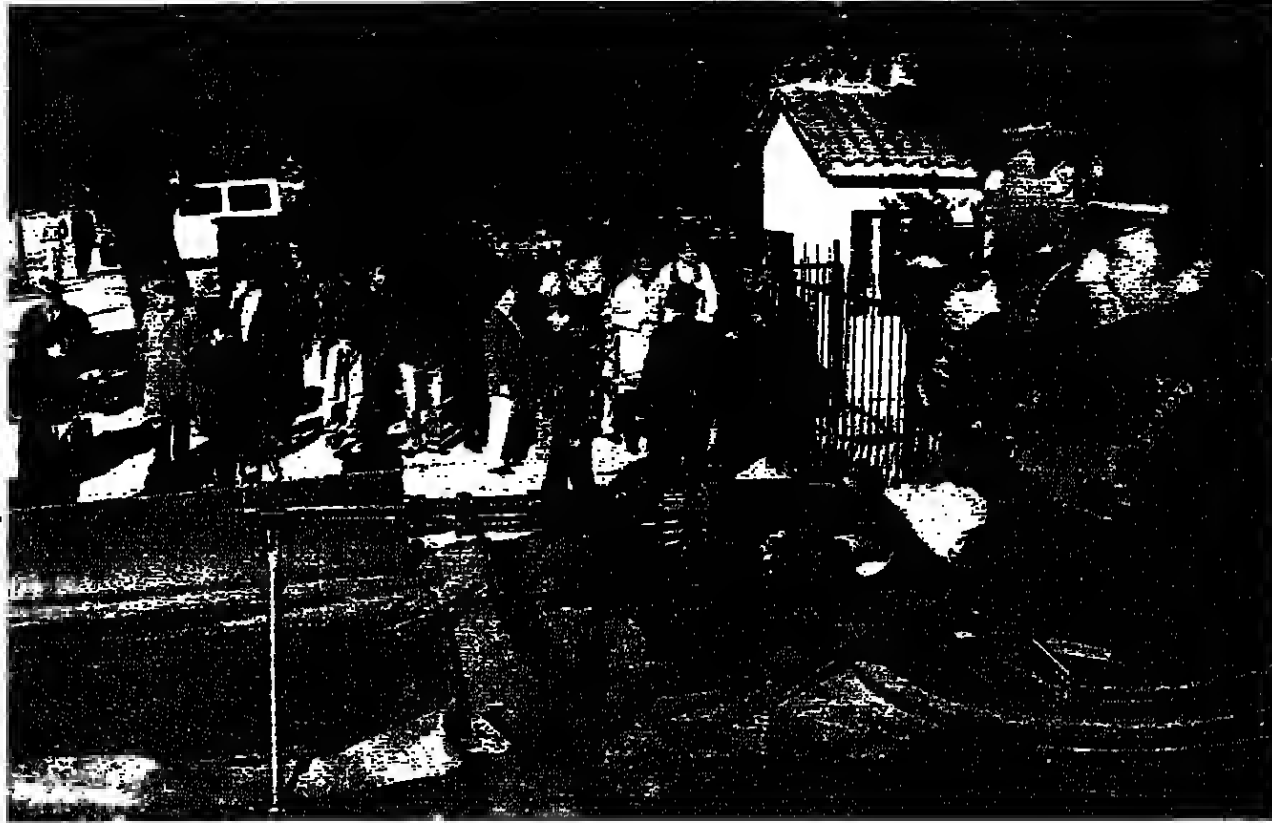
The split with the Communist Refoundation Party has confronted Prodi's uneasy coalition with its most serious political challenge in 11 months of office.

Prodi said the U.N. secretary general's statement meant Refoundation leader Fausto Bertinotti no longer had a reason to vote against the force when the deployment is put before the two houses of parliament for approval Tuesday and Wednesday.

"Bertinotti has always said that he wanted to move under the U.N. umbrella. Annan's statement meets precisely that requirement," Prodi told La Repubblica newspaper.

"It removes the alibi of those who consider the intervention of the multinational force a military intervention. Sure, they're soldiers. But everyone says military means are indispensable to ensuring civilian aid works," he said.

Annan said the security force of up to 6,000 troops, endorsed by the Security



Security men on Monday stand in an APC as security was tightened at the district court and other judicial institutions in Tirana in an attempt to restore order. Albania expressed concern on Monday about the slowness of deployment of an Italian-led force to protect aid to the anarchic state as Rome face political turmoil over sending troops (Reuters photo)

Council on March 28, had to move fast to bring humanitarian aid to Albanians and arrest the Balkan state's slide into armed anarchy and lawlessness.

"As one who has been in charge of U.N. peacekeep-

ing operations, I am keenly aware that, in these situations, speed is of the essence," Annan said in a statement released in New Delhi, where he is on a visit.

The force, some 2,000 of whose troops will be Italian,

is due to start arriving in Albania in the week from April 14.

It will be the first multinational mission led by Italy.

Albania's closest economic partner since the end of the cold war after a history that has swung from aggression to aid.

Refoundation's leadership was meeting Monday but Bertinotti said Annan's statement would affect the party's stance. It argues that the risks to Italian soldiers are too great and that the U.N. should send peacekeepers.

Although Refoundation is outside the centre-left government, Prodi relies on its support for a majority in parliament.

Centre-right opposition backing for the force means the mission will be approved and Prodi said at the weekend that his government would not fall over the row with Refoundation.

But he told La Repubblica that he was "fed up" with Bertinotti and made clear that Italian credibility abroad had been put at risk by the hickering.

"We have always moved in the wake of other countries which took on prime responsibility in situations like Albania. Now it's our turn," Prodi said.

Prodi was scheduled to meet parliamentary leaders of the parties in his coalition Monday (1500 GMT) to discuss the forthcoming votes. Refoundation was not due to attend.

It was not clear whether the party would be brought into subsequent talks to try to repair the split.

Hanbo founder admits bribing politicians

SEOUL (R) — The founder of South Korea's stricken Hanbo Group, in dramatic testimony broadcast live from a Seoul jail, told a parliamentary inquiry Monday that he had donated money to President Kim Young-Sam's election campaign.

But Chung Tae-Soo denied making personal payments to Kim and said his campaign contributions were within the law.

He dropped a bombshell by naming three leading politicians — one a potential presidential candidate for the ruling party in December elections — that he said took money from Hanbo.

In an unprecedented jail hearing, opposition politicians angrily accused Chung of lying as they sought to further smear Kim's image by tying him to the man at the centre of South Korea's biggest corporate failure.

Chung and nine others, including three of Kim's close associates in his New Korea Party, are on trial for bribery in connection with the failure of Hanbo Steel Co under debts of \$5.8 billion.

Prosecutors allege that Chung siphoned off millions of dollars from the bank loans and used it to buy influence with politicians and bankers to secure yet more loans.

A total of 19 ruling and opposition lawmakers, with television cameras and reporters in tow, descended on a jail where some of the 10 are being detained.

Public attention was riveted on the hearing after media reports that Chung would reveal a list of politicians he had bought off.

Hanbo was a corporate high-flyer under Kim's administration. But the collapse of its steelmaking flagship in January uncovered a tangled web of corruption that rocked the economy and devastated President's Kim's image.

Chung said he gave up to one billion won (\$1.12 million) to Kim's party, some of it to fund the 1992 presidential election.

But he said the contributions were legitimate. Chung, wearing light-blue prison garb, admitted asking Kim's close associate, Hong In-Gil, to help obtain bank loans.

Hong, one of those on trial over the scandal, has been charged with accepting bribes from Chung.

Chung said he understood Hanbo officials paid money to Kim Deog-Ryong, a member of the president's inner circle and one of nine people tipped as the ruling New Korea Party's candidate in presidential polls.

Fujimori: Peru crisis talks await right environment

LIMA (R) — Peru's government will not resume direct talks with Marxist rebels holding 72 hostages in Lima until it is confident of chances for real progress, President Alberto Fujimori said late Sunday.

Fujimori's crisis negotiator, Education Minister Domingo Palerm, has not met with the leaders of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) for three weeks.

The Peruvian leader said Palerm would not go back to the negotiating table unless there were prospects that talks could move forward.

"Minister Palerm cannot go and bash heads with the MRTA, but rather (talk) in an environment in which we can say that we are making progress," Fujimori said in an interview with Peru's Panamericana television network.

The breakdown in direct talks has left a three-man mediation panel to carry out a kind of shuttle diplomacy between the government and the MRTA rebels holed up inside the Japanese ambassador's residence for 110 days.

But Fujimori denied reports that one of the mediators, Vatican representative Juan Luis Cipriani, had elevated negotiations to the MRTA's leadership.

Local media reported that Cipriani had visited a naval base in the port of Callao late Friday where the MRTA's maximum leader Victor Polay and at least two other MRTA prisoners are serving life sentences.

But Fujimori said journalists had been misled by Cipriani's cur, which took a church colleague to collect a relative from the naval base.

A group of about 20 heavily-armed MRTA rebels stormed a cocktail party thrown by Japanese Ambassador Morihisa Aoki on Dec. 17 and took more than 500 guests hostage. They released most of the hostages, but kept a group including Aoki, two cabinet ministers, Fujimori's brother and the Bolivian ambassador.

Fujimori reiterated his pledge not to use force to end the 15-week standoff "unless there is an uncontrollable situation, in which there is a victim."

Taleban launch offensive against warlord

ISLAMABAD (AFP) — Taleban fundamentalist troops on Monday launched a new offensive on rival warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum in northwest Afghanistan, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) reported.

About 2,500 troops of the Islamic militia that now controls about two thirds of Afghanistan took part in the attack in Badghis province.

Fighting was underway in Bala Murghab close to Faryab province which "is controlled" by Dostum. Dostum warplanes had bombed Taleban positions, the independent information service quoted Taleban officials as saying.

At least three Taleban soldiers and six Dostum troops were killed in the fighting, Taleban officials told AIP from Kandahar, the Taleban headquarters in southwest Afghanistan.

The Islamic militia advanced five kilometres at Murghab, seizing armoured vehicles, including tanks, and capturing 25 rival troops, AIP said.

The fighting was continuing and fuller details of casualties and losses were awaited, the Taleban officials said.

Dostum's spokesman in Pakistan, Painda Mohammad, confirmed that fighting had erupted but said he did not have details.

The rival forces have been engaged in clashes for several months in Badghis, which is largely Taleban controlled. Thousands of residents have fled the conflict.

According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 34,000 people have gone to Herat province alone.

Taleban sources said Monday's attack was led by Mulla Abdul Razaq, govern-

nor of the western province of Herat.

The northwestern front battlefield is crucial to both sides as a Taleban breakthrough could seriously threaten Dostum's territory.

With two thirds of the country under its control, the militia has vowed to seize northern provinces from Dostum and his allies, former President Burhanuddin Rabbani and his military chief Ahmad Shah Masood.

But Monday's fighting followed the declaration of a ceasefire by the Taleban so that the United Nations could go ahead with a polio immunisation campaign in Afghanistan.

Aid officials in Kabul said Sunday that all rival factions had agreed to the ceasefire.

Peace mediation by the U.N. envoy Norbert Hol and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference have

failed to bring the warring factions to the negotiating table.

Japan launched a peace-brokered initiative last month, inviting delegations from all the Afghan factions to Tokyo.

A three-member delegation from the opposition, representing Shiite Hezb-e-Wahdat, Dostum's National Islamic Movement and Rabbani's Jamiat-e-Islami has returned from Tokyo after a week's stay.

"They want to create a platform for intra-Afghan negotiations," Wahdat's Mohammad Rasul Talib, who was in the delegation, told AFP here Monday.

Talib said the Japanese government was trying to convince the Taleban to send a delegation to Tokyo as part of their plan to arrange a joint meeting of all factions on the conflict.

Afghan anti-vice patrols catch six shavers

KABUL (AFP) — Mobile anti-vice patrols of the Afghan Taleban militia here have punished six men for shaving and three women for not being properly covered, state-run radio Shariat said Monday.

"Six men who had shaved their beards were kept in detention for 24 hours, and three women who had not observed the hejab (veil) were also punished," the Taleban mouthpiece announced. The ultra-fundamentalist militia has equipped Japanese-made four wheel drive armed vehicles with loudspeaker systems and patrol the city warning or punishing violators of their strict form of Islamic Sharia law.

The Taleban have so far dismissed scores of government workers guilty of trimming their beards, but this particular anti-vice campaign appears to be targeting all residents of the relatively liberal city.

In the light of the sackings of beard-trimmers, shaving is considered to be a particularly serious offence. Most male residents are now sporting Taleban-style bushy beards to avoid the patrols.

Kabul's women have also been forced to change their once neo-Western tastes in fashion. Virtually all wear the Taleban-sanctioned "burqa", a loose fitting head-to-toe cloak with a piece of hexagonal gauze through which the eyes get a blurred glimpse of the outside world.

U.N. official warns against laxness in fight against AIDS

GENEVA (AFP) — The head of the United Nations programme to combat AIDS warned Monday against the international community slacking in its efforts to find a cure in the face of new promising treatments.

"Our main enemy is inaction," said Peter Piot at the opening of a three-day symposium attended by officials of 22 governments as well as U.N. and other organisations involved in the battle against AIDS.

"Treatments, still at the experimental stage, that are at the top of the news are

related to this inaction in the sense that they prompt a new form of laxness that chips away at the notion of urgency," he said.

He also denounced various cultures for tending to ignore the illness and failing to promote efficient preventive measures that are not too expensive.

He said that while AIDS was regressing in various European countries and North America, it was spreading at an alarming rate in Asia as well as Central and East European countries.

"The world epidemic con-

tinues to spread," he told his audience.

He said that in 1996, about 3.1 million new cases of AIDS were registered and 1.5 million people, including 350,000 children, died from the disease.

These statistics represent a quarter of all deaths related to the HIV virus since the epidemic began in the early 1980, Piot said.

He hailed, however, successful efforts to combat the disease such as lowering the price of the female condom and making medication more accessible.

China says it cannot bite the capital punishment bullet

BEIJING (AFP) — China cannot afford to end the death penalty, Chinese experts and parliamentarians said Monday in reply to recent international critics.

"The Chinese government has no intention to abolish the death penalty," said Liu Hainian, director of the judicial research department of the Academy of Social Sciences.

"The death penalty has been kept in the newly amended criminal law because even in Beijing there are serious crimes and criminals offences," he told a press conference organised by the Foreign Ministry.

"The death penalty is

necessary to mete out severe punishments," Liu insisted.

China stepped up the number of death sentences last year when it launched its "strike hard" campaign against crime. Officials would not say how many people were executed in 1996 however.

Wang Jiafu, a member of the National People's Congress (NPC) law commission, said though 500,000 people were given "long-term to life imprisonment" for criminal offences.

According to partial statistics from regional news reports, almost 3,000 people were executed since the start of "strike hard" last April.

"Alongside the economic and social development and the further improvement of the social order, it will be possible to reduce the number of death sentences," Liu said.

"Personally, I have confidence in that. I hope to see that reduction," he added.

The NPC did stage an unprecedented debate last month on whether the death penalty — a bullet in the back of the neck — should be kept.

But China has been defending its human rights record in the runup to an expected vote next week at the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva on China.

NEWS IN BRIEF

India bus accident kills at least 14

GUWAHATI, India (R) — At least 14 people were killed and 13 injured after a bus collided with a truck on a highway in India's northeastern state of Assam, police said Monday. The accident occurred late Sunday near Bokakhat, 75 kilometres east of the state's main commercial city Guwahati, when the bus carrying 30 passengers collided with a truck headed in the opposite direction, a senior police official said. An estimated 50,000 people die each year in India in road accidents.

Singer arrested for heroin, bag-snatching

VIENNA (R) — Crooner Toni Wegas, who represented Austria in the 1992 Eurovision song contest, was arrested over the weekend for bag-snatching and heroin possession. Police said Wegas, 32, was accused of grabbing the handbags of women aged 83 and 81 in Vienna streets last week and they found drug utensils and heroin at his home. His girlfriend, named as Nina Sonja M., 24, also faces drug charges. Police said she worked as a prostitute to buy the couple's heroin. Wegas, born Anton Sarkoezi, sang the Austrian hit "Maria Magdalena" in the 1992 Eurovision song contest. He was given a suspended six month sentence for cocaine abuse in 1995.

German writer Stephan Hermlin dies

BERLIN (AFP) — The controversial German writer Stefan Hermlin died overnight in Berlin at the age of 81, his publisher announced Monday. Hermlin was one of the leading figures of official Communist literature in the former East Germany, and was awarded the National Prize several times by the state. He was a Communist militant from his youth, and was active in the struggle against Fascism. He also spoke out for East German dissidents like singer and writer Wolf Biermann. In 1937, Hermlin emigrated to Palestine, then moved to France in 1940 before moving to Switzerland in 1943.

Building collapse kills 2 soccer fans

HANOI (R) — Two teenagers died Sunday and 15 others were injured when a building overlooking a stadium collapsed during a soccer match in northern Vietnam. Hospital officials in Vinh City, some 300 kilometres south of Hanoi, said Monday the victims had been standing on the roof of the building where they had been watching a match between provincial teams from over the stadium wall. One person died immediately, the other died in hospital. The official said the building had collapsed under the weight of spectators.

Robbers shoot their way out of watch shop

HONG KONG (AFP) — Three armed robbers shot their way out of a watch shop in a busy shopping district here Monday, a police spokesman said. The men opened fire while trying to escape from the shop in Mongkok with bags full of Aroq 110 watches, worth three million Hong Kong dollars (\$390,000), police said. No one was hurt in the robbery. Police were still hunting the three men.

Honduran army chief survives attack

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras (R) — Honduran army chief General Mario Hung escaped unhurt from an armed attack on his caravan, Honduran Radio America reported Sunday. Honduras' criminal investigations directorate confirmed to reporters an attack took place Saturday night but said that it could not provide details until the investigation was complete. Unknown assailants sprayed Gen. Hung's vehicle with gunfire as he returned to Tegucigalpa with his family from his 50th birthday party at a military installation 25 kilometres north of the capital, Radio America said. An ambulance and two security vehicles in the general's caravan were also hit by gunfire, the report said. When soldiers investigated they found that the assailants had escaped, the radio report said.

Funds earmarked for 'mad cow' research

BONN (AFP) — Germany plans to spend 7.7 million marks (\$4.5 million) until 1999 to study "mad cow" disease and its suspected human counterpart, German Health Minister Juergen Ruetters was quoted Monday as saying. He told the Express newspaper that "mad cow" disease, or bovine spongiform encephalopathy, and creutzfeldt-jakob disease were both growing public health threats. "Besides AIDS, the issue of the possible transmission to man of 'mad cow' disease is the most important," Ruetters said, stressing how both are resistant to known medicines. Altogether, Germany's Health Ministry spends 32 million marks (\$20 million) a year on research into communicable diseases.

Romania mayor working secretly in Italy

BUCHAREST (AFP) — Regional officials in eastern Romania have begun legal proceedings to oust the mayor of a local village after discovering he was working illegally in Italy, local sources said Monday. Stefan Pavel, elected in June 1996 for a second four-year term as mayor of Piraghesti, took a one-month vacation last September to work in Italy where he claimed he could earn much more than his meager mayor's salary. But he never came back. Regional officials were bound by law to wait six months before beginning proceedings to oust Pavel. His family could not say what kind of job he had in Italy.

Spaniards oppose plan to release bear

LERIDA, Spain (AFP) — Local authorities and residents in northern Spain are opposed to a French plan to release a third bear into the Pyrenees as part of an EU-sponsored environmental programme, a local official said. Local people "are united in believing that the reintroduction of bears must stop," Jordi Peix, general director for the environment of the Catalonia region, was quoted as saying by the Spanish press. Two brown bears — Giva and Melba — were reintroduced into the area in 1996, but local shepherds reacted angrily after several sheep were killed, presumably by the bears. Peix said Spanish opposition would be formalised on April 21 at a meeting called by the Spanish Environment Ministry in the Pyrenees. He said that the French programme had been approved "without regard for a protocol under which the population concerned must give its agreement."

Suharto's son to wed this month

JAKARTA (R) — Indonesian President Suharto's youngest son, a business tycoon who has attracted much controversy, will marry a descendant of Javanese royalty later this month, Media Indonesia newspaper reported on Monday. Hutomo Mandala Putra, also known as Tommy Suharto, has been called one of Indonesia's most eligible bachelors in local newspapers. Reports of his past alliances with a local singer and other women have filled many gossip columns. Media Indonesia said Mandala Putra, 35, will marry 22-year-old Raden Ayu Ardha Pramesti Rigma Cahyani (Tata), an Australian-educated descendant of the Mangkunegara dynasty and also a distant relative through his mother's family.



Five-year-old Mystique Dinsdale, granddaughter of dog attack victim Koro Dinsdale, on Monday holds her grandfather's dog Puggy who survived the attack by a marauding bull-terrier cross on his farm near Te Puke, April 6. Relatives discovered Dinsdale covered in lacerations and deep cuts to 90 per cent of his body, with his lower right leg nearly severed after attempting to separate the two fighting dogs.

N.Z. man mauled to death by pit bull terrier

WELLINGTON (R) — A New Zealand man died after apparently being savagely mauled by a pit bull terrier he was taking care of for a friend, police said Monday. Koro Maraki Dinsdale, a 59-year-old freezer plant worker, was found dead Sunday night by his relatives less than 300 metres from his rural property near Te Puke in the north island, police said. They said the dog, which was shot dead at the scene of the attack, had been identified as a pit bull terrier — a breed with a widespread reputation for aggression. "He was covered in lacerations and deep cuts to 90 per cent of his body. His lower right leg is nearly severed...Also his arms, torso and hands have obviously been ripped as well," senior Sergeant Eric Newman told Radio New Zealand. Police said Dinsdale had gone to gather watercress in the early evening Sunday with two dogs — his own and one he had been looking after. When he failed to return his brother and two sons went to search for him and found him nearby, already dead. They told national television news that the dog thought to have killed Dinsdale approached them still snarling and was shot. Newman said it appeared Dinsdale had tried to intervene when the two dogs started fighting and was then attacked himself. He had probably died from blood loss.

Taiwan to withdraw Hong Kong secret agents — paper

TAIPEI (R) — Taiwan will pull out all its intelligence agents based in Hong Kong just before the British colony's July 1 handover to China, a Taipei daily said Monday. Taipei has ordered the withdrawal by June 30 of all Hong Kong-based agents of its national security and military intelligence bureaus as well as the justice ministry's investigation bureau, the China Times newspaper said. The withdrawal would prevent Taipei's spies from being arrested after the handover, the mass-circulation daily said. All three agencies declined to comment on the report. Hong Kong reverts to Chinese sovereignty at midnight on June 30 after more than 150 years of British colonial rule. Taiwan and China have been bitter political rivals since a civil war split them in 1949. The China Times said Taiwan was not giving up on Hong Kong as a window on political developments in China, but would use local informants instead. Hong Kong has long been a major intelligence post for Taiwan and China, as well as many Western countries keen for information on Beijing's government. The Taiwan cabinet's policymaking mainland affairs council has said it would continue to operate openly in Hong Kong after July under the terms of the Hong Kong-Macau relations act, enacted by Taiwan's parliament on March 18.

Zairean parliament calls off PM ouster debate

KINSHASA (Agencies) — The Zairean parliament Monday called off a meeting at which it was to discuss the destitution of Prime Minister Etienne Tshisekedi, parliamentary sources said. The cancellation came as troops and police intervened with tear gas and baton charges to disperse a demonstration by Tshisekedi supporters outside the parliament building. A proposal to oust Tshisekedi was due to be discussed following a joint statement Saturday by the main opposition coalition and the coalition supporting President Mobutu Sese Seko, withdrawing support for the premier who was named to the post only last Wednesday. Police and members of the civil guard encircled the building of the transitional parliament to prevent demonstrators from entering, an AFP correspondent observed. "We have received orders to let no-one through, either counsellors (members of the transitional parliament) or demonstrators," an officer said. An armoured division of the elite presidential division was deployed around the fine arts and the business administration institutes, located halfway along the road leading to the parliament building. Students of both these institutes were prominent among the Tshisekedi supporters who marched on parliament earlier, seizing private vehicles and attacking passengers they believed to be members of parliament heading to the debate. They then threw stones and torched vehicles near the parliament building, leading to the police intervention. Around a dozen students were beaten up by police forces, with one of them seriously injured. The demonstrators had been called out by Tshisekedi's Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDSP) to protest against the moves to oust him. The UDSP has remained loyal to Tshisekedi after other parties in the opposition coalition on Saturday withdrew their support from the premier, who last Thursday said he planned to dissolve the parliament.

The opposition coalition, which names the premier to be appointed by Mobutu, came out against Tshisekedi on Thursday after he said he planned to dissolve the transitional government. Rebel leader arrives in Zaire's diamond capital. Meanwhile, rebel leader Laurent Kabila arrived in victory in Zaire's diamond capital on Monday but to a smaller welcome than he received in the northeast city of Kisangani last month. Only hundreds of residents were on hand at Mbuji-Mayi airport to greet Kabila who flew in from the eastern city of Goma and hundreds more turned out to shout support as he drove into the city. The central region of Kasai, with its capital Mbuji-Mayi, is the homeland of veteran opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi, whose offer last week to rebels of ministry posts in his new government was rebuffed. "Kisangani was a psychological victory because it was believed that would be our Waterloo. It was the beginning of a certain confidence in our war," said rebel justice commissioner Mwenze Kungulu. "Mbuji-Mayi is not such a big psychological victory but it is still important in money terms because we have deprived (President) Mobutu (Sese Seko) of his power to fight us," he added.

ISLAMABAD (AFP) — Police used teargas and batons to tackle looting and unrest in several cities as Pakistan's month-long wheat flour crisis continues, witnesses and reports said Monday. Police scattered demonstrators blocking roads and looting flour bags from supply trucks at various places in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) Sunday, witnesses said. Dozens of people received minor injuries and many vehicles were damaged in stone-pelting by the crowds, they said. A Kashmiri militant fighter, Mast Gul, was held by police after he opened fire into the air at Nowshera in NWFP as he tried to make his way through a crowd blockading a main highway, local police said. Three companions of Gul, known for his exploits in the insurgency-rocked Indian-controlled Kashmir, were also held after two people were injured by stray bullets, a police official said. There was also looting of flour bags and roadblocks Sunday in Lahore, the capital city of Central Punjab Province, the mass circulation daily Jang reported. Police in southwestern Baluchistan province charged crowds with batons in the districts of Qila Saifullah and Qila Abdullah to open roads blocked by protesters, reports said. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's newly elected government has said the crisis would ease off soon, since shipments of imported wheat have already arrived and the harvesting of domestic crops was now underway. The administration has arranged the special sale of flour bags in various cities and the supply of wheat to mills has been stepped up.

The crisis has been blamed by government officials on wheat smuggling, particularly to neighbouring Afghanistan, as well as hoarding and mis-planned imports by the previous government. The federal government has approved the release of 24,000 tonnes of wheat from state warehouses for the northwestern region, which borders Afghanistan, an official statement said. "The crisis has brought people to the streets and an anarchy-like situation has arisen in NWFP," chief of Pakistani main fundamentalist Jamaat-i-Islami Party, Qazi Hussain Ahmad, told a public gathering in Peshawar Sunday. The administration has "disappointed" the masses less than two months after taking power, Ahmad said.

U.N. chief confident U.S. will pay arrears

NEW DELHI (R) — U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said Monday he was confident the United States would repay at least part of its \$1 billion in debt which has strapped peacekeeping operations. "My sense is that at the end of the day, we will get the money. How much, I don't know," Annan told a luncheon meeting with businessmen and diplomats in the Indian capital where he had earlier addressed a meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement. The United States owes the United Nations more than \$1 billion for back dues and peacekeeping operations. Congress has held up the dues amid charges of U.N. waste and inefficiency. Moving to remedy the problem now that there is a new U.N. secretary-general, President Bill Clinton in his 1998 budget request asked the U.S. Congress for \$100 million this year and a \$921 million advance appropriation that would not be disbursed until 1999. But some Conservatives in Congress are resisting approving funds to repay the arrears until Annan streamlines the United Nations. Annan, who was appointed U.N. chief last December after Washington opposed the renewal of his predecessor Boutros Ghali's five-year term, said Clinton was determined to repay the debt. "The administration is working very hard with Congress. I think there is a great deal of support in Congress," Annan said. "The United Nations needs the U.S. but the U.S. also needs the U.N. if the U.S. is going to lead, it has to pay its way." Annan said the more than \$2 billion in arrears that member states owed had hit peacekeeping operations particularly hard. Countries which have contributed forces to peacekeeping operations are owed between \$800 million and \$1 billion. Because of the shortfall in day-to-day expenses, the U.N. has to borrow from peacekeeping funds, which means not paying those contributing troops. Highest on the list is France, owed about \$135 million, followed by Britain at about \$80 million. The Netherlands, Pakistan and India come next, followed by nearly every country that has contributed troops to the United Nations since 1990. "We've got to the stage where some governments are refusing to participate. I hope as we move ahead and reform the U.N., members will commit themselves to meeting their legal obligations and pay their dues in full and on time," he said.

Wheat flour crisis sparks scattered violence in Pakistan

VIENNA (AFP) — Austrians on Monday were called to sign two petitions, one on improving the status of woman and the second on banning the sale and production of genetically altered foods. The grass roots petitions to be circulated through April 14 must be signed by at least 100,000 of the country's 5.8 million voters before they can be put before parliament for debate. Legislators, however, are not bound to adopt the two measures into law. According to a poll by the Gallup Institute, about 42 per cent of voters intend to sign the initiative on genetically altered foods. Another poll by the same company showed that 33 per cent of women and 13 per cent of men in Austria would sign the petition calling for the constitution to be amended so that the two sexes are considered equal.

SRINAGAR, India (AFP) — Indian border guards shot dead four Muslim guerrillas here Monday following a failed grenade attack on a police officer, officials said. Two other militants were arrested after the shootout with the Border Security Force (BSF). A BSF spokesman had earlier said three men had been detained. The initial attack occurred in a busy street in a residential area near Islamia College, the spokesman said. A group of militants threw a grenade and opened fire at the car of deputy superintendent of police Mohammed Shafi Patro. He escaped unhurt. Dozens of BSF personnel, who are deployed on Srinagar's streets, rushed to the site and cordoned off several houses from where the militants were firing. A prolonged gunbattle followed in which four militants died. A BSF officer said: "Our men recovered four AK-47 rifles and a universal machine gun (from the place)."

It was the bloodiest gunbattle in downtown Srinagar since a pro-India Muslim party took office in Kashmir in October, ending almost seven years of federal rule in the Himalayan state. Muslim militants are fighting for Kashmir's independence from India. Around 21,000 people have died in the campaign since 1989.

Austrians called to sign two petitions

4 guerillas killed after Kashmir grenade attack

State of emergency lifted in the Hague

THE HAGUE (AFP) — The mayor of the Hague Wim Deetman Monday lifted a state of emergency imposed at the weekend to prevent people from staging a banned demonstration in the Turkish quarter, local officials said. The measure, which allows police to bar access to the city to anyone considered undesirable and to make preventive arrests, had never been used previously in the Hague. Police Sunday forced more than 80 cars to turn away and questioned hundreds of people as part of the emergency regulations introduced by Deetman to head off possible disturbances by Turkish immigrants planning to demonstrate against racist attacks. No major incident was noted in the Turkish quarter where six members of a Turkish family — five children and their mother — died on March 26 in a suspected arson attack that outraged opinion throughout the country. Town Hall officials said the unprecedented state of emergency was made necessary by tensions within the Turkish community following the deaths. The officials said police had been informed that "certain groups were intending to demonstrate despite a ban imposed by the local authorities."

GREENSPAN (R) — U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan and NBC television correspondent Andrea Mitchell were married Sunday in what has been dubbed the capital's wedding of the year. The private ceremony took place at the elegant inn at Little Washington in Washington, Virginia, with Supreme Court Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg officiating, according to NBC officials and a friend of the couple. The couple's 75 guests were brought to the Quaint Virginia town located about 1 1/2 hours away from Washington D.C. in buses stocked with champagne. The bride, 50, is NBC's chief foreign affairs correspondent, based in Washington. The bridegroom, 71, has been the Federal Reserve chairman since 1987. The bride's first marriage ended in divorce. The bridegroom's first marriage was annulled. In a recent interview Mitchell said the couple would not honeymoon right away because of their hectic schedules. Guests included ABC's Barbara Walters and her friend, Sen. John Warner, ABC's David Brinkley, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell, and former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Scientist sues creationist over Noah's Ark

SYDNEY (R) — The never-ending battle between science and creationism entered a Sydney courtroom Monday with Noah's Ark at the centre of the latest tussle. "Where do we start? At the beginning?" quipped Judge Ronald Sackville as he opened a case centring on whether an Australian creationist breached fair trading laws on a 1992 lecture tour. An Australian scientist and a U.S. marine salvage expert are suing creationist Allen Roberts for breach of copyright and for misleading the public in lectures on his exploitations of what many believe is Noah's Ark in Turkey. "It is not an argument that the creationist science, which is one of those oxymorons, is more valid than conventional science," Melbourne geology professor Ian Plimer told reporters outside the federal court of Australia.

"It is an argument about creationist misleading and deceiving," said Plimer, who is partly financed by Australian skeptics and has a long history of challenging creationists. But while the protagonists' lawyers told the court that the story of creation was not on trial, the small courtroom was packed with supporters from both sides of the divide. And before the lunchtime adjournment the words of the book of Genesis — "and the Lord said I will destroy man, that I have created from the face of the Earth" — were tendered as evidence describing the Bible's great flood of 40 days and 40 nights which apparently led Noah to build his gigantic ark. Both sides agree this courtroom brawl between scientists and creationists, who believe the world was created over seven days 6,000 to 10,000 years ago, will not have the same impact as the famous "monkey" trial in the United States in 1925.

Then a young Tennessee biology teacher, John Scopes, was tried for breaking the law and teaching Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution. Scopes was found guilty, but the public outcry forced Tennessee to moderate creationist education. But with the Sydney trial scheduled to last until May 2 many in the courtroom believe it is bound to challenge the beliefs of both scientists and creationists. At the centre of the latest dispute are two claims. Marine salvage expert David Fasold claims Roberts, who holds a U.S. Christian education doctorate, breached copyright by using his drawings of the Akyayla archaeological site, near Mount Ararat in eastern Turkey, in lecture tour literature.

Fasold, who was involved in the excavation of the temple scroll cave which produced one of the Dead Sea scrolls, first produced his drawings of the Turkish site in 1985 and then again in 1987 and in his 1988 book "The Ark of Noah." Roberts, held hostage for three weeks by Kurdish separatists in 1991 after examining the site, sold lecture brochures in 1992 containing Fasold's drawing to raise money to return to Turkey. "I see them as exploiting and embellishing (my drawing) to try and use it to create the concept that creation science is balanced science and I object to that," Fasold told Reuters. Professor Plimer claims Roberts misled his paying audience by referring to various scientific reports of the site as partly a result of his work and by selling videotapes of his lectures — both actions, he said, break Australian fair trading laws. "As a scientist I have been to the site and looked at his claims and I say they are not convincing," Plimer said. "One could go to many places in inland Australia and hear the crows crying out 'ark' and see boat-shaped arks."

Roberts refused to talk to the media Monday, but his supporters were in force, heckling Plimer as he spoke. But in his lecture video, played to the court, Roberts said the Turkish site "appeared to be a boat, the kind any child would recognise", adding it was the size of a "battleship" and matched the dimensions of Noah's Ark in the book of Genesis. Roberts does not say he believes the Turkish site is Noah's Ark, but concludes with the question: "If this is not Noah's Ark, then what is it?"

'Mosaics — vehicles of a message'

Following is HRH Crown Prince Hassan's address to the Madaba Mosaic Colloquium which was presented on his behalf by Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Akel Biltaji on Monday:

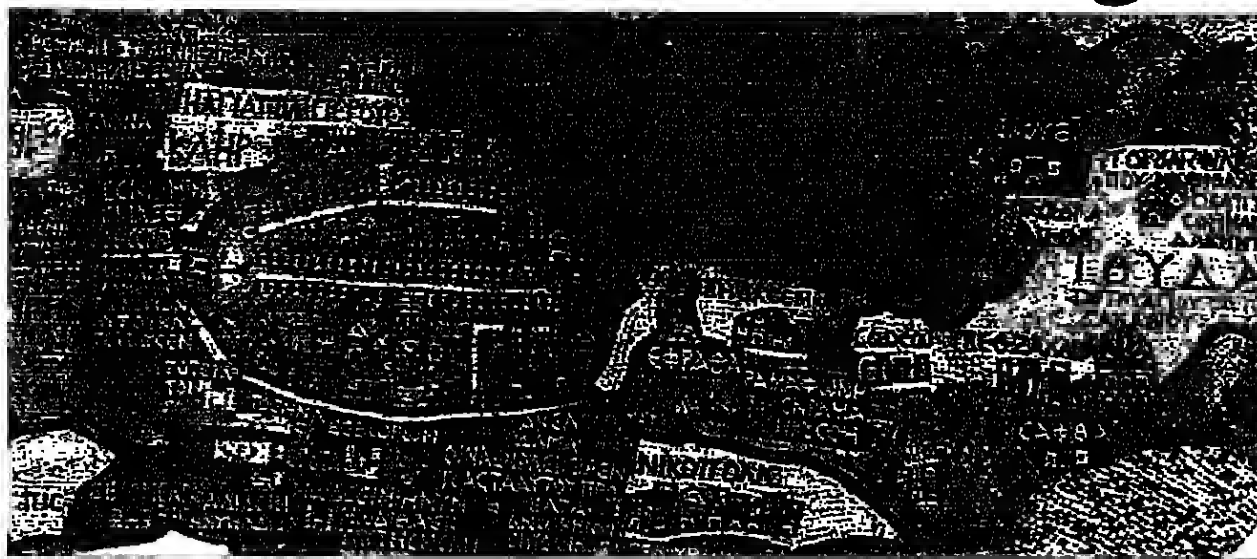
IT IS a pleasure for me to address you today at the opening of this highly specialised colloquium dedicated to the Madaba Mosaic Map, and to extend to our distinguished guests a very warm welcome.

I take the sub-title of this colloquium, "Travelling Through the Byzantine Umayyad Period" as implying continuity between these two historical periods, and that the Church of Saint George which was graced by the Mosaic Map continued to be used as a place of worship throughout the Umayyad period. In this respect Saint George's Church was not an exception, for I am told that archaeological research in the last 15 years has shown that no less than 46 Byzantine Churches in Jordan alone continued to be used as such well until the mid-8th-century and beyond, and no fewer than five churches were constructed and paved with coloured mosaics in the Umayyad period.

These discoveries show that the essence of Islam was distinguished by a broad liberal attitude and an openness of mind which shunned narrow sectarianism and religious bigotry. They also convey a picture which is drastically different from that which portrays Islam as a fanatical and intolerant creed that utterly rejects the other. Islam which belongs to the family of monotheistic scriptural religions also recognised the underlying bonds that exist between the children of Abraham. Likewise Islamic culture at its height encompassed a dazzling fusion of traditions which would not have been possible without respect and tolerance for that which was different and that which was other.

In Jordan we have been promoting inter-faith dialogue and intercultural debate because we are convinced that only through understanding and tolerating differences the three monotheistic faiths can offer hope for a better future. While we recognise that the specifics of our rituals and practices are vital, they must never obscure the values of tolerance and compassion for all our fellow human-beings. It is the denial of the shared humanity of the other and the rights that flow from it which lead to the nightmare of violence and terror.

As one looks at the mosaic pavements in Madaba and



The Madaba mosaic map (detail)

its immediate vicinity, one cannot fail to notice the exuberant celebration of the fruits of the harvest. These scenes were vehicles of a message, of an idea such as abundance and fertility, deliverance and security through divine intervention, and the blessing of life on earth. Paramount among these ideas is the Animal Paradise of the Messianic Age as prophesied by Isaiah. "The wolf shall feed with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the bull and the lion shall feed together." (Isaiah 11:6-7). This yearning for peace is best reflected in a mosaic panel from the Church of Saint George in Khirbet Al Mukhayyat situated halfway between Madaba and Mount Nebo. The panel depicts two animals flanking a palm-tree; on one side is written in Arabic script the word, "bi-Salam" meaning, "in peace." This hope of our forebears remains ours to this very day. Like them we strive that it may finally be achieved.

Since Jerusalem was regarded by the three monotheistic faiths as the "navel of earth," it was only natural that the Holy City will occupy a central place in the Madaba Mosaic Map.

Mostly it seems difficult to think straight about a place like Jerusalem, for Jerusalem is more than a city: it is an idea, a religious idea, and its landscape is dotted with a network of holy places venerated by Muslims, Christians,

and Jews. It was for this very reason that no Caliph or a Muslim ruler ever had Jerusalem as his seat of government, though the Muslims held sway over the city for centuries beginning from the mid-seventh-century and invested heavily in it.

In Bayt Al Maqdis (The Holy Abode) the Muslims call Jerusalem, peoples, city and holy places become one, linked in destiny and God's plan, and then apotheosised into Heavenly Jerusalem. Would the followers of the three monotheistic faiths come together in the same holy abode in juxtaposition and not in collision, and to worship the same omnipresent God, and thereby fulfill the pluralistic concept apparent in the prophecy of Isaiah. "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." Let us hope so, otherwise religion will become a determinate of rights, responsibilities and status, and thus a source of conflict instead of a vehicle for reconciliation.

In conclusion I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the members of the organising committee who prepared this colloquium and to the scholars whose contributions will further its success, wishing you all pleasant encounters and vibrant exchange of ideas in the course of the next two days.

Thank you.

Randa Habib's corner

Wasted revenues

SORRY TO tell you that there will, after all, be no Arabdisney in the suburbs of Amman. At least not in the near future. As for those of you who called me to inquire about how get shares in the projected Arabdisney, well, I hope you are not too disappointed to know that it was just an April fool's joke.

Now with that cleared up, let us get down to business. Our topic this week is in fact good business.

Bearing in mind the crucial difficulties facing the Jordanian economy and statements voiced by officials regarding the best ways to raise much needed funds for the country, it seems to me that we can start by having a close look around.

I was told (and I am still shocked by this number), that 34,000 cars have entered the Kingdom tax-free over the years. Owners of those cars simply didn't have to pay any customs tariff. We are not talking here of course of diplomatic cars, or those of regional companies, but merely of vehicles owned by people, who for one reason or another, were able to get exceptional duty exemptions for their cars.

Bearing in mind, also, the number that we just mentioned, we can hardly call these exemptions, exceptions. In fact it seems that too many people are enjoying a special treatment that is not only unfair (because most of them have the financial means to pay the custom duties on their cars) but also extremely costly for the budget.

Let us make a simple calculation: By taking an average figure of JD 30,000 as custom fees on each car, we find that ... JD 1,200 billion have gone down the drain instead of supporting a cash-strapped treasury.

Not bad for a poor country with economic difficulties isn't it? And believe me, the figure is even higher, as the majority of these cars are luxurious Mercedes (not having an exemption why not go for the best?), on which customs fees average much higher than JD 30,000.

Maybe the government should think of this more than one billion JDs in lost revenues in case it feels compelled again to raise the prices of basic commodities in the country.

Leave the poor alone they can pay no more. The answer to the country's financial remedies lies in the swelling fortunes abroad of those who are not willing to pay their respective shares.

Israeli premier reveals little of Mayo Clinic summit with King

(Continued from page 1)

sure everyone, you, prime minister, and I know, King Hussein and many, many others in our area share and we should do our utmost to achieve." Mr. Netanyahu said.

Foreign Minister Faysal Tarawneh meanwhile said the United States had no "ready" formula for the acceleration of the faltering Middle East peace process. Al Hayat newspaper reported on Monday.

"I cannot say that there is an American initiative ready to be submitted to the two parties (Israel and the

Palestinians)," Dr. Tarawneh said in an interview with the leading Arabic newspaper conducted in Washington.

"But there is a serious attempt to find the path which could lead to such an initiative," he added, also dismissing claims of any Jordanian initiative to push forward the peace process.

"But we are ready to do everything in our power to help both sides," Dr. Tarawneh said.

Dr. Tarawneh insisted on the need to "build trust" between Israel and the Palestinians ahead of any Israeli plan to accelerate

negotiations "through quick implementation of safe passages between the West Bank and Gaza, the opening of the Gaza port and airport in addition to freezing everything on the ground (Jewish settlements)."

Dr. Tarawneh warned that time was running out to save the peace process from collapse, stressing that "any initiative which does not take into account the (Jewish) settlements will not succeed."

Rochester meanwhile, welcomed the King-Netanyahu meeting by a banner saying "peace" flew in downtown along

with Jordanian and Israeli flags.

"It seems like it makes the world a little bit smaller," said Lisa Clark, who lives in nearby Stewartville.

About 20 protesters urged Mr. Netanyahu to stop settlements.

"We are here to deliver a message to Mr. Netanyahu and anyone who might follow in his steps that there is no peace in the Middle East if it's not just," said Ayman Ibrahim, who is an American of Lebanese descent.

Another protester in Mr. Ibrahim's group carried a sign that read "Netanyahu Hitler."

Archaeology proves Islam's tolerance — Crown Prince

(Continued from page 1)

The three-day colloquium is organised by the Department of Antiquities and the Jerusalem-based Franciscan Archaeological Institute in observance of the (1897-1997) centenary of the discovery of the Mosaic map of the Biblical lands which is now located at Saint George's Church in Madaba.

The map under the church's floor is a true geographic map of Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Sinai and Egypt. It was discovered by work-

ers who in 1896 were building a new Greek Orthodox church on the ruins of a Byzantine church in the northern part of Madaba.

Participants in the meeting from the U.S., Italy, France, Spain, Egypt, Palestine, Israel and Jordan are to review a number of working papers on the mosaic map, which dates back to the 6th century A.D. and will inspect the map at St. George's Church.

See the full text of the Regent's address to the colloquium on page seven.

Abbas briefs Crown Prince on PNA's stand on crisis

(Continued from page 1)

Palestinian leadership is keen on ending all forms of tension which obstruct negotiations.

He said the Palestinians are seeking the resumption of the peace process in order to achieve progress and said that the recent acts of violence were triggered by Israel's decision to construct a new settlement in Arab East Jerusalem, noting that the construction of this settlement constituted a flagrant violation of the Israeli-Palestinian peace accords.

Mr. Abbas was quoted in a newspaper interview on Monday as saying the Palestinians were ready to negotiate with Israel, but on the basis of the 1993 Oslo accords.

"We are ready to take part in negotiations, whether in the 'Camp David' style or in any other form, as long as discussions remain on the basis of the Oslo accords and the land-for-peace principle," Mr. Abbas told the London-based Al-Asharq Al-Awsat daily.

Mr. Abbas had resigned March 10 as chief of the Palestinian delegation to the peace talks with Israel.

He was referring to a proposal by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to hold a "Camp David" style summit.

"We refuse any initiative which will not be based on the Oslo accords," Mr. Abbas said.

"We have red lines which cannot be crossed over under any condition, and we want the international community and the United States to force Israel to implement this accord to which we are bound," he said.

Mr. Abbas said Israel was responsible for the current crisis in relations that can only end if it "ceases the construction of settlements" in Arab East Jerusalem and pursues negotiations with the Palestinians in line with the set agenda.

He also said Mr. Netanyahu was "not serious" when he threatened to occupy territories controlled by the Palestinian self-rule authorities in an attempt to end the new cycle of violence.

"This threat carries great risks. The occupation of these territories has ended forever and it is impossible for Israel to think to end the peace process through such an invasion," he said.

Israel sticks to its guns over settlements

(Continued from page 1)

war, not only on the Palestinian people but also on the peace process" (see separate story).

Though Mr. McCurry too declined to comment on their talks he indicated the president has not backed down on his opposition to the construction.

"Our views on that question are well-known and certainly well-known to the prime minister," he said.

Mr. Netanyahu was reportedly anxious to win U.S. backing for his proposal to start peace negotiations on a "fast track" that would address so-called final status issues more quickly than originally planned.

Palestinians regard the proposal as a ploy conceived to sideline the "land-for-peace" formula at the heart of the peace process.

Although Mr. Clinton has promised to do everything in his power to restart the peace talks, he downplayed prospects for a summit in this high-risk climate and stressed that the two sides must work out their differences.

ences. Mr. Clinton countered widespread speculation for a three way summit with Mr. Arafat which is considered too high risk in the volatile climate.

"It's important not to jump the gun on that. The first thing we have to do is get the process going again," he said, adding that Mr. Netanyahu has "some ideas to get the substance working."

Mr. Clinton reiterated the U.S. line that there should be "zero tolerance for terrorism," a clear message that Mr. Arafat must get tougher on violence.

But the president also demanded measures to build "confidence on both sides that peace is possible," an allusion to the U.S. desire to see Mr. Netanyahu reverse his position on the new settlement in Arab East Jerusalem.

Mr. Netanyahu praised U.S. efforts to foster the Mideast peace process and noted that like King Hussein — who he visited Sunday in a U.S. hospital (see separate story) — Mr. Clinton has taken risks for

peace. "He is the world leader who is also taking tremendous efforts, and tremendous pains to assist us in the quest for peace," he said.

Spokesman McCurry said Mr. Clinton viewed Mr. Netanyahu as fundamentally "committed to peace in the region" despite Palestinian distrust and Mr. Clinton sought to ease Mr. Netanyahu's "security" concerns.

The prime minister told an Israeli lobby group earlier that he would stand firm against any Israeli concessions in return for a real crackdown by the PNA on "terrorism."

"This means, pure and simple, surrender to terrorism. We are being told to pay for the privilege of not being killed. We are not going to do that," he said.

And Mr. Clinton kicked off their Oval Office talks hatching his stand, saying: "I agree that freedom from 'terrorism' is something that no one should have to purchase."

Party merger of eight expected

(Continued from page 1)

tions, on "social development and the unity of all Jordanians, who should work together to build a modern Jordan, rather than wasting time discussing who's who and what's what."

Though the new party has not yet elaborated its stand regarding the election law slated to regulate the coming parliamentary elections, Mr. Muasher said that the new law "should lead to the best possible representation of the people" and all voters

should be entitled to elect the same number of candidates.

Criticising the electoral system which regulated the 1989 general elections and which established a different number of seats for each constituency, Mr. Muasher said "the ideal solution would be to divide the country in a number of constituencies, each of them electing an equal number of deputies."

But, "over all, the election procedures should be simplified" and the regulations for the prepar-

tory phase clarified, Mr. Muasher urged.

The announcement that the National Constitutional Party will issue a unified list of candidates suggests that the centrists are determined to achieve a controlling majority in the Lower House of Parliament. Experts are now wondering whether a unified list representing the new merger will confuse the voters, who are not left with much time to get acquainted with the new political formation on the arena.

Hariri urges more Russian involvement

(Continued from page 1)

al contact with officials in the countries involved in the crisis. "I think we will be able to come out with some initiatives after these consultations," Mr. Primakov said. Mr. Hariri was scheduled to hold talks with Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin later on Monday. He is due to meet President Boris Yeltsin on Tuesday. A ministerial delegation accompanying Mr. Hariri will also hold talks on boosting bilateral economic ties. On Wednesday, Mr. Hariri will leave Moscow for Paris on his way to Canada for another official visit.

Arafat wins non-aligned backing

(Continued from page 1)

expense of our land and holy shrines," Mr. Arafat said.

Colombian Foreign Minister Maria Emma Mejia, whose country is chairing the conference, said in her opening speech that the NAM "cannot but demand the immediate cessation of construction of Israeli settlements."

She said she had sent a letter to Mr. Arafat "expressing our concern for the convening of a special session of the General Assembly."

"It is with deep concern that we have been observing the increasing deterioration in the peace process in the Middle

East," Ms. Mejia said. "We cannot but demand the immediate cessation of construction of Israeli settlements in Jabal Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem."

Mr. Annan, who said an emergency session would be held if 50 per cent of U.N. members called for it, had earlier backed NAM's call for reforms to the world body's Security Council.

"Reform must occur to bring the council into line with the realities of today," he said.

"I am leading a thorough and wide-ranging review of the activities of the U.N. Among them is reform of the Security Council ... It is my

hope that this issue can be resolved soon."

He told delegates that NAM "represents some two thirds" of the United Nations membership.

"Your advocacy of the United Nations reforms agenda will help to ensure its legitimacy and effectiveness."

Zimbabwe's Foreign Minister L.S.G. Mudenge, speaking for the African member nations, echoed Mr. Arafat's criticism of the Israeli settlement in Arab East Jerusalem. "The settlements will throw the peace process into the abyss," he said.

U.S. votes on March 7 and March 21 prevented action by

the U.N. Security Council on Israel's plan to build the settlements on Jabal Abu Ghneim.

"Jerusalem is the core of the Palestinian cause, it is the key to peace and war in the region," Mr. Arafat said. "Peace will not be realised until Jerusalem returns to its legitimate owners as the capital of the independent Palestinian state."

Mr. Arafat urged NAM members to follow recent resolutions of the Arab League seeking to review diplomatic ties with Israel.

"These resolutions also have called upon the brethren and friendly countries which have initiated the process of establishing relations with Israel to link the progress in these relations with the degree of Israeli

commitments to U.N. resolutions," he said.

Indian Foreign Minister Inder Kumar Gujral welcomed Mr. Arafat's "thought-provoking account to the developments in the Middle East."

"We assure President Arafat of our support for the realisation of the rights of the Palestinian people," he said to applause.

An Iranian delegate told Reuters: "We sympathise with the stand of the Palestinian leadership and the Arab stand against Israel. It is a balanced acceptance of our view that Israel was never sincere about a just peace in the Middle East."

Hizbollah, SLA swap prisoners

BATER, Lebanon (Agencies) — Three Lebanese detained by Israel for 12 years were released Monday in a Red Cross-supervised prisoner exchange for a pro-Israeli militiaman.

This was the second such swap this year under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) between the pro-Iranian Hizbollah and the pro-Israeli South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia.

The trade took place at the Bateer crossing, 30 kilometres southeast of Beirut, which links the town of Jezzine on the north of the Israeli-occupied zone with the rest of the country.

Hizbollah released Georges Khoury, 31, who had been kidnapped in August from his home in Hdah near Jezzine by guerrillas of the Islamic Resistance, the Hizbollah military arm which carries out most of the anti-Israeli attacks in South Lebanon.

The SLA freed Jaafar Hraish, Mohammad Hazime and Nehme Bazzal, who were kidnapped in 1985 while they were 15, 18 and 22 years old. They were imprisoned

without trial in SLA-run Khiam prison, the largest Israeli detention centre in the zone.

"My son was kidnapped by the Israelis while he was going to school in Tehnine (South Lebanon). They accused him of being a Hizbollah member although the party didn't exist at the time," Hajj Ali Hazime told AFP.

"Mohammad was 18. Today he is 31," he added.

An ICRC vehicle picked up the Hizbollah prisoners from Khiam and took them home to their villages, also inside the enclave.

Another ICRC vehicle brought Khoury from government-controlled territory and handed him over to a militia checkpoint at the Bateer-Jezzine crossing.

The Bateer-Jezzine mountain crossing, east of this provincial capital of southern Lebanon, is one of several linking government-controlled regions in the north and territory held by Israel and the militia near the border in southern Lebanon.

who had come to greet them and immediately taken to Beirut aboard a Hizbollah ambulance.

On Jan. 3, Hizbollah swapped, via the ICRC, the remains of two unidentified SLA soldiers who had been killed in 1986 for the remains of two of its fighters killed in 1996.

"Our policy is to free all the prisoners in the hands of the Zionist enemy and its agents, whether they are Hizbollah members or not. We asked for the release of the prisoners held the longest," a Hizbollah spokesman said.

The latest releases brought to 180 the number of prisoners freed from Khiam in two years. About 145 Lebanese and other Arabs are still held without trial at the hilltop prison.

Of the second group, 19 have served their sentences but remain in "administrative detention," according to Israeli officials.

The Khiam prisoners are mostly anti-Israeli guerrillas, villagers who refuse to pay taxes to the SLA and people who refuse to let their sons be conscripted into the SLA.

Arabs seek help from Investment Guarantee Agency to lure capital

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Arab states have decided to seek help from the World Bank to attract foreign capital as part of overall reforms intended to revive their economies, an official report said Sunday.

The inter-Arab Investment Guarantee Corporation (AIGC), grouping regional governments, said it had signed an agreement with the World Bank's Investment Guarantee Agency (IGA) to promote investment opportunities in member states.

"Although the agreement covers partial fields of cooperation, it is very important as it will help overcome investment obstacles in the region," the Kuwaiti-based AIGC said in its monthly bulletin, obtained here.

"It will contribute to increasing the flow of private investments to Arab countries amidst growing interest by international investors in the region following the success of several member states in upgrading growth rates

and creating a more balanced economy and the right investment climate," it added.

The Arab World has remained among the least attractive regions for investment due to slow growth rates, budget deficits, inadequate investment laws, accumulating debt, inflation and political instability.

According to the Gulf Organisation for Industrial Consulting, direct foreign investment in the 22-member Arab League stood at only \$3.1 billion in 1995 compared with \$315 billion in investments worldwide.

Investment by the European Union in the 22 members accounted for only 2.2 per cent of its total foreign investment of \$142 billion, the Doha-based group said in a report. It also showed Japan's investment in the region did not exceed seven per cent of its total assets while those by the United States constituted only six per cent of its investment worldwide.

In contrast, Arab states

remained major capital exporters, with their overseas investment ranging from \$600 billion to \$800 billion, concentrated in the West in real estate, stocks and equities, and bank deposits.

Nearly half of them are controlled by the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

"The guarantees to be provided by AIGC and IGA should remove any fears by foreign and Arab investors from non-commercial risks, which they believe still exist in some countries of the region," AIGC said.

"Cooperation between the two institutions will also remove other obstacles blocking promoting investment in Arab states since the lack of information about available investment opportunities are among the main hurdles facing investors seeking to set up businesses in the region," it added.

Experts said Arab countries needed to pursue reforms to ensure a successful implementation of the AIGC-IGA agreement.

They expected the accord to boost capital flow into members which have improved investment regulations.

"Other members need to accelerate reforms to show they are serious in redressing their economies. I do not think the agreement will now benefit members that have not taken any measures given their political circumstances," an expert pointed out.

AIGC said the pact it signed with IGA in February covered promoting feasible projects in the Arab World, identifying guarantee services offered by the two institutions, exchanging information about guarantee contracts, and providing training in the field of investment promotion and guarantee.

Most Arab states are members of the 137-nation IGA, which has signed a total of \$2.3 billion in investment guarantee contracts. Arab states which have not joined IGA are Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, Mauritania, Djibouti and Comoros.

Japan aid shrinks 35 per cent to lowest level in six years

TOKYO (R) — Japan's foreign aid in 1996 fell 35 per cent from the previous year to \$9.58 billion, the lowest dollar figure in six years, the foreign ministry said Monday.

The weaker yen against the dollar, a shrinking foreign aid budget and rising repayments from developing countries on long-term loans pushed Japan's net disbursed aid in dollar terms to the lowest level since 1990, officials of the ministry's Economic Cooperation Bureau said.

The ratio of the 1996 official development assistance (ODA) to gross national product (GNP) stood at 0.21 per cent, the lowest since 1978 when the ratio was 0.23 per cent, the officials said.

Net disbursed aid is obtained by subtracting repayments on loans from the overall disbursed aid.

The 1996 figure means that it would be difficult for Japan to meet its 1993-1997 goal disbursing foreign aid worth \$70 billion.

Japan has extended foreign aid worth \$49.2 billion in the past four calendar years, the officials said. The figure for 1997 was unlikely to top the 1996 figure, they added.

Ministry officials said it was not clear if Japan would keep the position of the world's largest aid donor, a ranking it has held since 1991 when it overtook the United States.

The Paris-based OECD was expected to announce the 1996 figures for industrialised countries in June.

China tops World Bank ranking of economic 'emerging giants'

WASHINGTON (AFP) — China's economy produced more than \$745 billion of goods and services in 1995, topping the list of economic "emerging giants" identified by the World Bank in a new annual publication.

While the United States had the largest economy with a gross national product (GNP) of \$7 trillion, the World Bank said China and nine other countries alone accounted for 19 per cent of world output in 1995.

Other growing economic powerhouses identified in the new World Bank publication, World Development Indicators 1997, included Brazil, Russia, India, Mexico, Argentina,

Indonesia, Turkey, Thailand and Pakistan.

Luxembourg was ranked the richest country in terms of GNP per-capita in 1995, at \$41,210, followed by Switzerland (\$40,630), Japan (\$39,640), Norway (\$31,250) and Denmark (\$29,890).

The United States (\$26,980) was ranked seventh. Lowest on the GNP per-capita rankings list was Mozambique, at \$80, with Ethiopia at \$100 per capita and Zaire at \$120 per capita.

The World Bank said World Development Indicators, a compilation of data and analysis on more than 200 economies, "will become the yardstick for

measuring success in alleviating poverty and improving people's lives."

The new publication draws on expertise from dozens of international organisations including the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation.

"World Development Indicators starts from the premise that development is about the quality of life," World Bank President James Wolfensohn said in a statement.

"It places people and poverty reduction first, at the centre of the development agenda, where they belong," he added.

The publication contains sections examining various

aspects of development. It said, for example, that average life expectancy has increased from 55 years in 1970 to 64 years today.

In Norway, a man can expect to live to be 75, while in Niger average male life expectancy is only 44 years.

Other facts in World Development Indicators:

— The population of the world is nearly six billion, twice what it was in 1970;

— World population will grow by 2.5 billion in the next 35 years, and 90 per cent of that growth will be in developing countries;

— Infant mortality rates have declined from 107 per 1,000 live births in 1970 to 60 in 1995. The rate in Cambodia is 108 while in the United States it is eight;

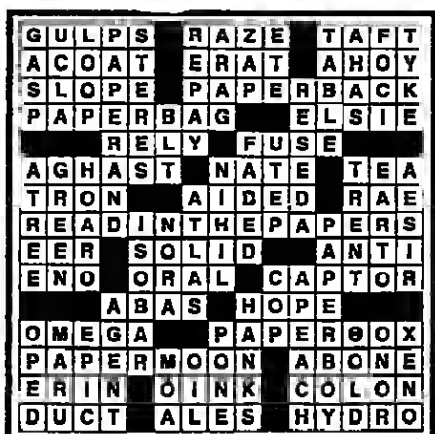
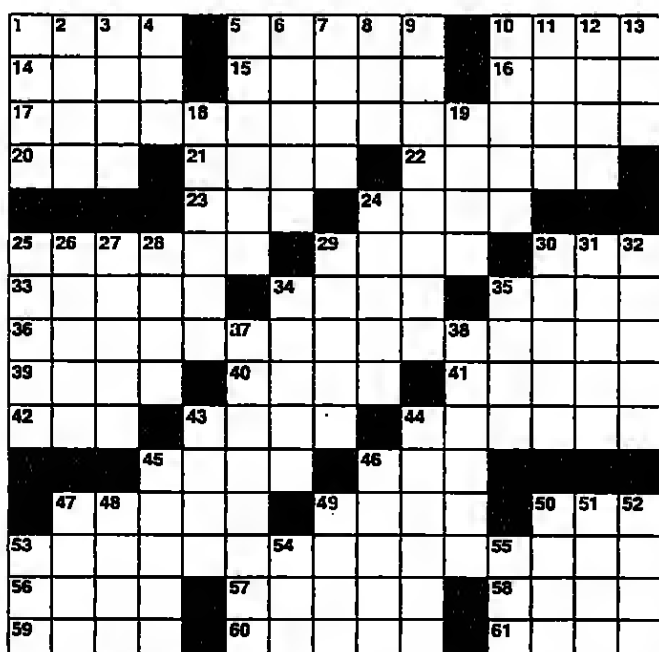
— The United States in 1994 produced 13,243 kilowatt hours of electricity for every man, woman and child. India produced 423. Togo produced 24.

THE Daily Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Phone outlet item
- 5 Acid in tone
- 10 Clay pigeon hurler
- 14 Hand lotion ingredient
- 15 Guard from attack
- 16 Hawkeye State
- 17 Prepare to proclaim
- 20 Have a meal
- 21 Equine hue
- 22 Photographer Adams
- 23 Samovar
- 24 Current
- 25 Jeans fabrics
- 29 Low card
- 30 Drink like a cat
- 33 Play about Peron
- 34 Red planet
- 35 Musical ending
- 36 Land in trouble
- 39 God of war
- 40 Nose alert
- 41 Rope fiber
- 42 Leb. neighbor
- 43 Rock group, Motley —
- 44 Reverberates
- 45 Crafts' partner
- 46 Sturdy tree
- 47 No-no
- 48 Cigar end
- 50 Alias, briefly
- 53 Give up
- 56 Commando's forte
- 57 More vexed
- 58 Wan
- 59 Official helper
- 60 Abrasive powder
- 61 Category

by Diana C. Baldwin



DOWN

- 1 Preserves
- 2 Baseball family name
- 3 — de grace
- 4 Barbie's beau
- 5 Movie stars
- 6 "Over There" songwriter
- 7 Flush
- 8 Inhabitant: abbr.
- 9 With the most latitude
- 10 Fuddled or unsteady
- 11 Get dressed
- 12 Missing G.I.
- 13 Peace, to Caesar
- 18 Author Capote
- 19 "Showboat" captain
- 24 Faux pas
- 25 Artist Edgar —
- 26 Each and —
- 27 Saltpeter
- 28 "How sweet —!"
- 29 CA border lake
- 30 Matching game
- 31 Astaire of note
- 32 Whittles down
- 34 — operatic
- 35 Ready money
- 37 Carapace wearer
- 38 Game hoop
- 43 Brag
- 44 Cafeteria, for one
- 45 Dwelling
- 46 Different
- 47 Bangkok native
- 48 Waterless
- 49 To be, in Bordeaux
- 50 Out of town
- 51 Marine plant
- 52 To shelter
- 53 Refrain syllable
- 54 — de plume
- 55 Make a choice

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REUTERS

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The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	1.7098	0.5144	1.4685	125.76	1.3888	1682.20	1.9230	6.7815	
GB Sterling	1.6276	2.7837	—	2.3863	204.79	2.2603	2738.29	3.1303	3.3607
JP Yen	0.0080	1.3882	0.6879	1.1653	—	1.1036	13.57	162.79	4.5707
IT Lira	0.0006	1.0147	0.3845	0.0871	1348.30	0.8243	—	11.42	3.4144
FR Franc	0.1739	0.2971	0.1067	25.4002	21.84	0.2414	33.42	33.4200	—

Energy		
Oil	Last	Previous
Brent	17.25	16.50
Bony	17.25	16.50
UL Gas	191.00	186.00

Mid-East Currencies				
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	JPY
SA Riyal	0.2666	0.4560	0.16384	0.3913
KW Dinar	3.3003	5.64334	2.02789	4.84282
CY Pound	1.9634	3.3566	1.2055	2.6798

Metal Prices		
Metal	Bid	Offer
Gold (oz)	348.45	348.95
Platinum (oz)	365.5	366.3
CU (3 Months)	2280	2284
Lead (3 Months)	650	653

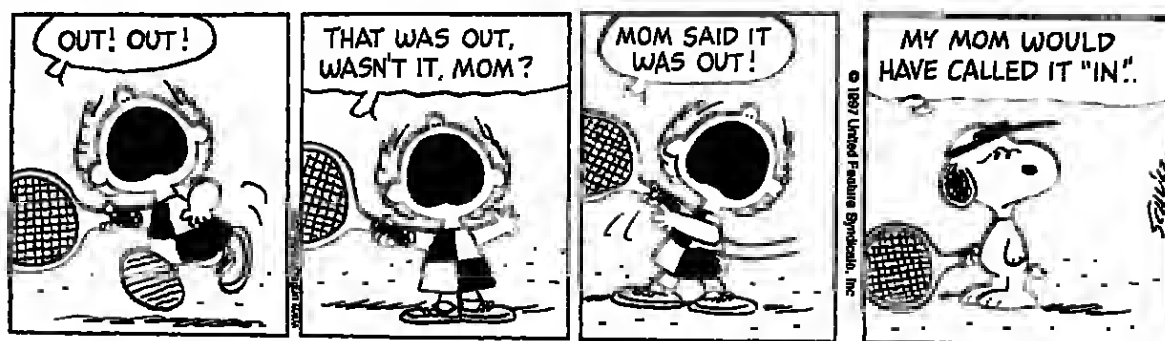
Currency Deposit Rates (Bid)					
Period	1	3	6	9	12
Ony	Month	Months	Months	Months	Year
USD	5.53	5.58	5.55	5.06	6.19
JPY	0.28	0.50	0.58	0.82	0.47
FRF	3.15	3.18	3.25	3.29	3.36
ITL	7.08	6.98	6.92	6.80	6.81

Main Market Indices					
Bourse	Index	Value	Chng	% Chng	High
New York	DOW JONES	6571.02	44.95	0.69	6527.21
London	FT-SE 100	4271.5	35.2	0.83	4273.1
Paris	CAC 40	2572.31	54.34	2.16	2588.11

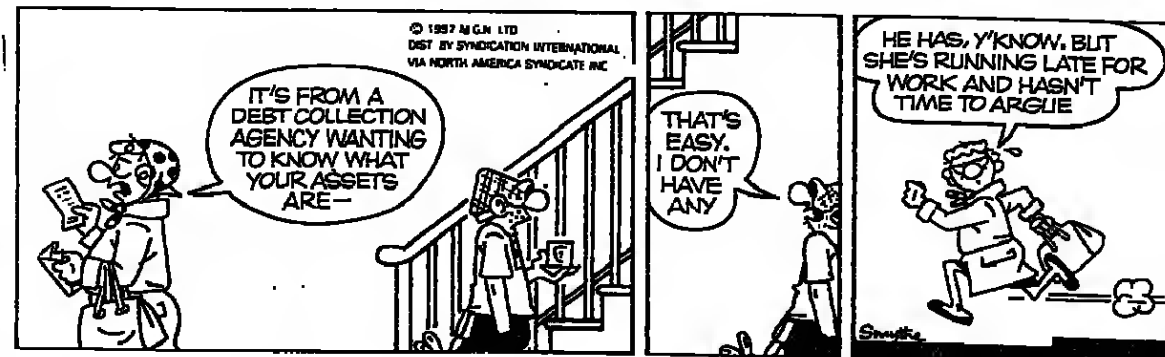
Energy		
Commodity	Last	Delivery
Coffee (c/lb)	183.83	Spot
Sugar (\$/ton)	310.3	Spot
Soya (c/lb)	22.54	Spot
Barley (c/lb)	0	Spot

JOD Cross Rates		
Currency	Buy	Sell
US Dollar	0.708	0.710
DE Mark	0.4182	0.4203
FR Franc	0.1242	0.1248
NL Guilder	0.3716	0.3735

Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n' Jeff



HOROSCOPE FORECAST FOR TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 1997

By Thomas S. Pierson, Astrologer, Carroll Righter Foundation

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Be certain you have kept an important promise to the letter today before considering any new projects. Avoid an overly critical person who has nothing kind to say for every idea or business plan you wish to pursue. **TAURUS:** (April 20 to May 20) Your fellow business associate may be rather difficult this morning, however, don't allow that spoil your mood. Entertain some guest in your home later this evening and make them feel welcome to be there. **GEMINI:** (May 21 to June 21) You should not allow a disagreeable fellow associate today to get your dander up. Stay around those people who maintain upbeat attitudes later this evening and thereby make you feel fired up and enthused. **MOON CHILDREN:** (June 22 to July 21) Postpone an entertainment you were considering today. Instead, find some manner of adding to your income and improving your property which could put some additional funds in your pocket for an emergency.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) You should not allow an irritating home situation keep you today from completing your business activities. Improving your appearance and wardrobe would be wise, thereby gaining the attention of those who can make you successful.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Instead of just daydreaming your spare time away today, labour on improving your efficiency with your career activities. Avoid the temptation later this evening to disagree with your mate which could cause friction.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Revise your budget today, cutting out all unnecessary expenses, thereby having some extra funds. Get out and socialise later this evening, you're likely to make some valuable contacts which will be quite beneficial.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You may be a bit too fixed in your views today, so try to keep an open mind for a change and listen to what others have to say objectively. Later this evening would be good for going out on the town with close friends.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Some trustworthy friends today can help you make big progress very quickly, so be sure to ask politely for help if you need it. Later this evening would be good for you to meet with big-wigs and make a plan of action on a project.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Steer clear a friend today who tends to be too demanding and sometimes gets on your nerves. Don't neglect any important business matters later this evening which will demand immediate attention.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You'll have a considerable amount of luck today at being in the right place at the right time, so keep your eyes open for opportunities. Later this evening you can spend a romantic time with your mate and do something special for him or her.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) Your fellow associates can be very helpful today, however, someone you don't know too well could give you bad advice, which could hurt your success. Consider new ideas carefully before you act on them.

Birthstone of April: Diamond — Amethyst

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic press

Jordan French Insurance Company distributes dividends at a rate of 15%

DESPITE RECORDING a 22 per cent decline in net profit, the Jordan French Insurance Company is distributing cash dividends at a rate of 15 per cent. The annual report for 1996 shows that the company's net profit dropped by JD169,000 and stood at JD586,000 at the end of last year. The dividends which were approved by the general assembly last week amount to JD330,000.

According to the report, the company's direct earnings from premiums amounted to JD5.58 million in 1996 compared to JD5.95 million earned in 1995. Of last year's earnings, JD2.30 million were the share of reinsurers. The company paid JD3.16 million in compensation for claims but of this amount, JD1.23 were the reinsurers' shares.

Net profit generated by the company from insurance operations totalled JD686,000 (JD138,000 or 16.7 per cent less than the total in 1995) of which JD382,000 were profits from "outside agencies." The vehicles department generated a JD75,000 profit, the report said. The profit generated from insurance operations were JD138,000, or 16.7 per cent higher at the end of 1995.

Other financial figures appearing in the report show total assets at JD10.06 million, 10 per cent higher than the total at the end of 1995. Of the amount, JD5.26 million were long-term deposits at banks and JD491,000 were investments in stocks and shares of public shareholding companies. The company maintains a total of JD2.04 million of technical reserves and a total of JD4.25 million of reserves for claims under settlements. The share of reinsurance in the second reserve mentioned amounts to JD3.30 million.

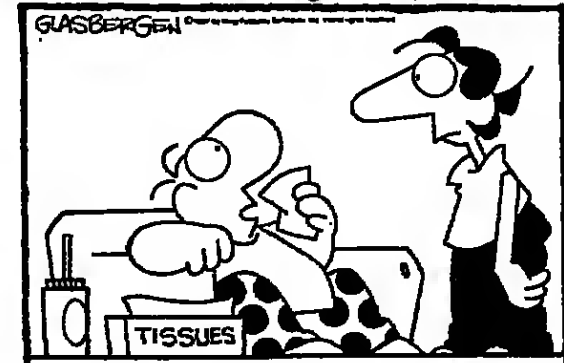
The Jordan French Insurance Company was established in 1996 and the shareholders' equity has reached JD3.41 million at the end of last year. The Arab and foreign stake account for 16.75 per cent of the capital which amounts to JD2.2 million. (Al Ra'i + Al Dostour).

Work progressing on Abdoun telephone exchange

THE JORDAN Telecommunications Company is currently working on a new project to provide the telephone service to the residents of Abdoun area. According to Walid Dweik, the company's board chairman, the project will comprise an exchange with a capacity for 14,960 number. The project, expected to cost about JD3.5 million, is scheduled to be in service this month in addition to expanding the necessary distribution network to connect the subscribers and constructing the necessary buildings for placing the equipment.

Mr. Dweik indicated that the completion of network will be during the third quarter of this year. Afterwards, work will begin on transferring the numbers of the subscribers from the Wadi Sagra exchange to the Abdoun exchange and on giving new numbers to the subscribers within the area over stages (Al Ra'i).

THE BETTER HALF. By Glasbergen



"I accidentally downloaded a computer virus at work and now everyone in my office has the flu."

JUMBLE. THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

UNGED
TROFY
LACKET
ROWDYS

Answer: "HIM" (Answers tomorrow)

Jumbles: MINUS CLOUT PESTLE TURNIP
Answer: What a boogie does when he loses a horse race - PONIES UP

Government authorises Jordanian-Saudi consortium to operate new radio-paging service in the Kingdom



Minister Bassam Saket (right) and USC director Abdul Aziz Hakabani sign documents of the agreement (Petra photo)

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The government and a Jordanian-Saudi consortium on Monday signed an agreement under which the company would operate a new radio-paging service in Jordan.

The most outstanding feature of the new service, expected to be operational in March 1998, is that subscribers in Jordan could get messages on their pagers from almost all the Gulf countries and most European countries which use the same system, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, said.

It will be the second radio, paging services in Jordan, which first opened the telecommunications market for the private sector by

licensing the Kingdom's first independent operator outside the state monopoly in that sector in 1990.

It is also part of the Kingdom's programme to reduce state investments in telecommunications services and give way to the private sector to enter the lucrative market.

The agreement was signed by Transport and Communications Minister Bassam Saket, Telecommunications Regulatory Commission Director General Yousef Abu Jamous and Abdul Aziz Hakabani, director-general of the United Saudi Communications (USC), a consortium of Jordanian and Saudi interests.

The project is expected to create about 100 jobs and will offer paging services throughout Jordan.

The Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC), a government body chaired by the minister of telecommunications, is supervising the privatisation of the telecommunications sector.

The USC offer of 2,197,000 dinars (\$5.91 million) for the concession was the highest among the three pre-qualified bidders.

"The consortium members have experience as operators of a successful paging business in Saudi Arabia," said a TRC press release in March. "They are committed to using the state-of-the-art ERMES paging standard in Jordan."

The ERMES system is

widely used in the Arab Gulf states as well as more than 70 per cent of all European countries. Mr. Hakabani was quoted as saying by Petra. As such, subscribers to the service in Jordan could get messages from all countries which use the same system.

The present operators, Jordan Radio Paging, uses the VHS system, a company official said.

The TRC said in its March statement the proposed agreement with USC was the first in a series of licensing initiatives taken by the TRC with the assistance of McCarthy Tetrault, a Canadian law firm, which acts as its advisor.

The commission has issued two tenders for operators of public telephones. It also plans to float tenders for a trunking licence "in the near future," said the press release.

Other proposed projects include a licence for value added data service providers which is being finalised and two more licences for cellular phones which will go operational as of Nov. 1, 1998.

"These licensing initiatives have been authorised by the government of Jordan as part of its plans for the rapid development of the telecommunications sector through the introduction of competition and private investment," said the TRC.

Saudi prince, Gulf investors to pump JD 5m to raise capital of Philadelphia Bank

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A Saudi billionaire and other Gulf businessmen will invest more than five million Jordanian dinars (\$7 million) to raise the capital of the Philadelphia Bank for Investment, a bank spokesman said Monday.

Nimr Shakaa, the bank's director general, said the move by Prince Al Waleed Ben Talal was part of efforts to raise the bank's capital to 20 million Jordanian dinars (\$28.1 million) in line with Central Bank regulations.

He added that the four-year-old bank has 60 million dinars (\$84.5 million) in assets and its current capital is 10 million dinars (\$14 million).

He said the remaining five million dinars (\$7 million) will come from unidentified Jordanian investors.

Mr. Shakaa said that Prince Al Waleed is among three other Gulf investors who will take part in the new bid. The other three are Khalifa Saif, Mohammad Al Jaber and Jamal Al Gharer from the United Arab Emirates. "The move is an evidence of foreign investors' confidence in our economy in general and our financial institutions in particular," Mr. Shakaa said in a telephone interview. He added that the bank's capital increase will be effected from June. The Saudi prince has major investments in Europe, the United States, Canada and the Middle East.

Last year, Prince Al Waleed paid three million dinars (\$4.2 million), a 20 per cent of a capital of 15 million dinars (\$21.1 million), to construct a Four Seasons Hotel in Jordan. Press reports in the local media indicated that the Saudi billionaire was considering to purchase a high per cent of the debt-ridden Royal Jordanian.

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET											
HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - SHARJAH											
TELEPHONE: 607171 / 607179											
ORGANISED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR MONDAY 01/04/1997											
PAST 12 MONTHS HIGH	PAST 12 MONTHS LOW	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DIV.	NO. OF SHARES	NO. OF TRADED	VALUE TRADED	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE	PERCENT
269,000	210,000	ARAB BANK	11.7	1.58	2	520	131810	251.00	253.50	2.50	1.00
2,100	1,400	JOR. NATIONAL BK.	5.3	0.00	7	891	1657	1.63	1.61	-0.02	-1.25
2,610	2,120	INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK.	5.3	0.00	3	1050	2426	2.32	2.31	-0.01	-0.43
5,100	4,250	THE HOUSING BK.	12.7	2.91	3	500	2370	4.75	4.74	-0.01	-0.21
2,950	2,440	JOR. SECURITIES BANK	19.3	0.00	2	70	188	2.70	2.67	-0.03	-1.10
2,800	1,380	UNION BK. SAV. INV.	6	0.00	1	1000	1450	1.45	1.45	0.00	0.00
7,950	1,100	BEIT AL-HAL (JEITHA)	14.42	0.00	1	1550	1524	1.10	1.04	-0.06	-5.45
1,440	1,000	PHILADELPHIA BK.	9	0.00	5	828	930	2.18	2.12	-0.06	-2.75
BANK SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 192.02	CHNG: +0.58	33	6456	142526				
2,710	1,760	JOR. FRENCH INSUR.	5.0	11.30	3	539	983	1.77	1.77	0.00	0.00
2,320	2,100	MOLY LAND INSUR.	6.7	0.00	1	800	1800	2.15	2.25	0.10	4.70
INSURANCE SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 118.17	CHNG: +0.14	4	1339	2783				
1,830	1,480	JOR. ELECTRIC PWR.	11.4	7.27	36	7183	11871	1.66	1.65	-0.01	-0.60
9,250	7,800	JOR. HOTEL TOURISM	11.5	1.38	2	176	1408	8.00	8.00	0.00	0.00
1,540	990	NATL. PORTFOLIO	9	0.00	43	23650	22814	0.99	0.94	-0.05	-5.05
1,050	920	REAL ESTATE INV.	12.1	8.00	2	500	431	0.89	0.87	-0.02	-2.25
2,200	1,250	MID. EAST HOTELS	55.1	0.00	5	2850	4721	2.26	2.23	-0.03	-1.37
1,220	960	ZAKA EDUCATION	7.9	0.00	2	8200	3729	1.00	0.98	-0.02	-2.00
2,230	1,650	UNIFIED CO.	7.9	6.63	4	950	2577	2.67	1.66	-1.01	-37.83
SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 100.74	CHNG: -0.57	80	40309	46557				
3,720	3,760	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	20.1	2.85	6	577	1318	2.51	2.51	0.00	0.00
10,400	8,720	JOR. PETROL. REFINERY	10.3	7.87	9	1257	10119	20.17	20.16	-0.01	-0.05
1,590	1,150	WOOLLEN INDUSTRIES	58.6	0.00	2	1500	7000	1.35	1.32	-0.03	-2.22
3,280	1,650	INDUSTRIAL COM. AGR.	30.1	0.00	5	250	250	0.60	0.58	-0.02	-3.33
7,950	6,450	JOR. HOUSING BLDG.	8.7	3.67	2	1550	10871	6.80	6.82	0.02	0.29
4,100	3,040	JOR. PHARM. MANF.	70.0	5.49	9	20405	7297	3.65	3.64	-0.01	-0.27
7,250	5,650	JOR. CERAMIC IND.	8.2	3.79	4	3650	2486	6.60	6.60	0.00	0.00
8,150	4,250	JOSE ALDAMA CO. INTL.	15.9	4.23	3	1500	7047	5.75	5.73	-0.02	-0.35
960	450	LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	11.6	0.00	23	14335	7993	0.55	0.55	0.00	0.00
1,400	1,040	JOR. PAPER CO. TP.	21.1	9.91	1	900	570	1.04	1.04	0.00	0.00
1,020	540	NATIONAL INFO.	8.1	10.17	2	2400	1407	0.59	0.59	0.00	0.00
1,540	730	INTERMED. PETRO. CHEM.	9	0.00	12	3650	7115	0.74	0.74	0.00	0.00
1,150	630	JOR. ROCKWELL INDUS.	9	0.00	1	250	166	0.66	0.64	-0.02	-3.03
7,720	2,110	NATL. CABLE WIRE. MFAC	14.1	0.00	4	2400	2221	2.30	2.38	0.08	3.48
1,170	570	JOR. SULPHUR CHEM.	9	0.00	16	4560	2985	0.64	0.67	0.03	4.69
1,670	1,100	JOR. PHARM. CHEM.	25.8	0.00	32	2100	2902	1.40	1.39	-0.01	-0.71
7,740	1,420	UNIV. HIGH. INDS.	4.7	12.90	21	4350	4784	1.54	1.55	0.01	0.65
1,360	1,080	INTL. TOBACCO	27.5	0.00	3	920	936	1.18	1.17	-0.01	-0.85
1,470	920	UNION CH. & VEG.	30.1	0.00	3	5150	4968	0.92	0.95	0.03	3.26
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 116.40	CHNG: +0.02	146	51176	97492				
GRAND TOTAL			INDEX: 151.36	CHNG: -0.29	263	99280	289358				
PARALLEL MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR MONDAY 01/04/1997											
690	370	CENTRAL GEN. STORAGE	16.4	0.00	2	2400	984	0.39	0.41	0.02	5.13
780	440	JOR. TRADE FAC.	12.0	0.00	2	2500	1125	0.45	0.45	0.00	0.00
880	480	UNION TR. 50%	65.1	0.00	2	3000	540	0.68	0.68	0.00	0.00
840	370	APAR FIN. INVEST.	9	0.00	4	3400	1360	0.40	0.40	0.00	0.00
950	720	AL-SHARQ INV. 75	14.0	2.00	11	101000	57510	0.82	0.82	0.00	0.00
850	450	AL-DHILAT 75	14.0	0.00	1	550	352	0.64	0.64	0.00	0.00
1,090	600	UNIV. METALS	9	0.00	1	300	171	0.60	0.57	-0.03	-5.00
1,690	1,300	KATL. CHLORIDE	8	0.00	6	2300	2243	1.41	1.41	0.00	0.00
690	420	ARAB ALUMINA CO. INTL.	9	0.00	6	2000	160	0.80	0.80	0.00	0.00
720	490	TEXTILE	9	0.00	4	2350	1181	0.51	0.51	0.00	0.00
850	400	NATL. MULT. ENG. NABICO	9	0.00	38	23431	24977	0.68	0.69	0.01	1.47
990	710	JORDAN STEEL	8.1	0.00	189	1845795	464441	0.98	0.90	-0.08	-8.12
700	430	ARAB ELECT. INDUS.	9	0.00	11	4878	2644	0.75	0.75	0.00	0.00
750	400	HIDESTY FRAM. 75%	9	0.00	2	4400	2244	0.51	0.51	0.00	0.00
1,330	910	UNION TOBACCO 75%	9	0.00	1	700	252	0.61	0.61	0.00	0.00
770	530	NAXI PHARM. 65%	9	0.00	36	97052	22912	0.56	0.69	0.13	23.21
660	390	INDUS. ENG.	25.9	0.00	1	250	305	0.43	0.42	-0.01	-2.33
980	740	INDUS. CERAMIC	9	0.00	1	250	195	0.80	0.78	-0.02	-2.50
760	580	PEARL SAN. P. CONV.	9	0.00	2	280	153	0.64	0.61	-0.03	-4.69
820	590	KATL. POULTRY	9	0.00	9	2980	1214	0.63	0.64	0.01	1.59
1,020	800	ARAB INT. FOOD FACT.	65.3	0.00	4	800	726	0.93	0.93	0.00	0.00
870	530	MID. EAST COMPLEX	9.4	0.00	29	26750	21068	0.79	0.80	0.01	1.27
GRAND TOTAL			362	3175806	617000						

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Hingis beats Seles for 6th of year

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, South Carolina (R) — Top seed Martina Hingis picked up her sixth and most hard-earned singles title of 1997 Sunday, outduelling fourth-seeded Monica Seles in the final of the \$926,250 Family Circle Magazine Cup.

Hingis, undefeated this year in 31 matches, beat Seles in the final of a WTA Tour event for the second straight week, 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7-5).

The Swiss 16-year-old rallied from a 2-5 deficit in the third-set tiebreak and received a first-prize pay-day of \$150,000. Hingis dropped just three games in a straight-sets victory over Seles in the final of last week's Lipton Championships.

Hingis, the youngest number one player in women's tennis history, unseated Germany's Steffi Graf at the top of the WTA Tour rankings last Monday.

Seles, playing in only her second tournament of the year, suffered her third straight loss to Hingis, also having lost in the final of the bank of the west classic in Oakland last November.

"If you are 5-2 down in the tiebreaker and you know you have to play against the wind, you just try to make her (Seles) do the mistakes," said Hingis. "I just fought back and tried to move her around and make her tired. She just played much better, much more clever this time."

Seles was seeking her 39th career singles title and her first since the Nichirei International last September. She was making her Hilton Head debut after withdrawing from three previous Family Circles due to injuries.

"I just wanted to go out there and take it a point at a time and go for my shots," said Seles. "I did that most of the time, and in the key points I didn't do that."

"I had some great points, and it was a great match, and it was a lot of fun to play. I really think I played more my game a little bit and attacked more, which in the past I didn't do."

Hingis was playing in her eighth successive final, dating back to last year. She has also won the Australian Open, the Sydney International, Pan Pacific Open, and the Open Gaz de France.

No last minute miracles as Sweden, U.S. go through

Moya saves Spain from Davis Cup whitewash

PARIS (Agencies) — There were no last-minute miracles as first Sweden and then the United States joined Australia and Italy in the semi-finals of the Davis Cup on Sunday.

Sweden, who led 2-1 after Saturday's doubles, were taken all the way by South Africa in Vaxjo before claiming victory in the final singles — Jonas Bjorkman coming back from two sets to one down to beat Grant Stafford 3-6, 6-0, 3-6, 6-2, 6-2.

In Pesaro, Italy Omar Camporese completed a 4-1 Davis Cup World Group quarter-final victory for Italy over Spain when he beat Albert Costa 6-2 3-6 6-4 in the second reverse singles on Sunday.

The Italians had already booked themselves a place in the semifinals by winning Saturday's doubles for a 3-0 lead.

Earlier, Spanish number one Carlos Moya made sure his team escaped a whitewash when he beat Marzio Martelli.

The Italian, who was making his Davis Cup debut, gave the world number eight a tough time before losing 7-6, 4-6, 6-3.

Italy will meet last year's beaten finalists Sweden in the semifinals from September 19-21.

Sweden's 3-2 victory was a hard-fought affair which kept the home fans on the edge of their seats.

After Wayne Ferreira had levelled the tie by scoring a superb straight-sets 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 win over Sweden's number-one Thomas Enqvist, everything depended on the final rubber.

And Bjorkman, who came into the singles as a late replacement for the injured Magnus Larsson, needed to stage a spirited revival before clinching the semi-final berth after trailing Stafford by two sets to one and then by 0-2 in the fifth.

Australia already clinched their quarter-final win by taking an unbeatable 3-0 lead on Saturday.

And despite late-night celebrations, they completed a 5-0 whitewash of the Czech Republic — big serving Mark Philippoussis beating Martin Damm 6-4, 6-2 in the first of the dead-rubber reverse singles and Patrick Rafter then coming back to beat left-handed David Rikl 7-6 (15/13), 0-6, 6-2 in the second.

Australia have won the Davis Cup 26 times. But their last success came in 1986 and they are hungry for more Cup glory, and both captain John Newcombe and Tony Roche feel the team can go all the way.



The U.S. Davis Cup team celebrates their victory over the Netherlands in their quarter-final match in Newport Beach. From left: Rick Leach, team captain Tom Gullikson, Andre Agassi, Jim Courier and Jonathan Stark, who advance to the semifinals against the Australian team (Reuters photo)

Agassi leads U.S. to victory

NEWPORT BEACH, California (R) — slumping Andre Agassi rallied from a two-sets deficit to lead the United States to victory over the Netherlands in their Davis Cup quarter-final Sunday.

Agassi beat Jan Siemerink 3-6, 3-6, 6-3, 6-3, 6-4 to give the Americans an insurmountable 3-1 lead. Jonathan Stark later swept past Sjeng Schalken 6-4, 6-0 in a meaningless fifth match.

"If it's safe to say I was gone then I guess it's safe to say I'm back," said Agassi, who has won 15 successive Davis Cup matches to improve to 24-4 in cup play.

"That is Andre Agassi," said Netherlands coach Stan Franker. "The former number one in the world and tough warrior when he plays for his country. The guy just pulled himself by his shoelaces and came out smoking."

Agassi's stirring victory set up a September 19-21 semifinal clash against Australia in World Group play. Though the site has yet to be determined, it will be played in the United States.

Agassi has been struggling lately with a 3-5 mark on the ATP tour, and the three-time Grand Slam champion had to make several adjustments against the hard-serving left-hander, who hammered 24 aces and 14 double faults in his second five-set loss of the weekend competition.

"It's difficult because you get down two sets because the guy is kicking your butt, so now you have to do

something different and then make it work," Agassi said. "It's not an easy thing to do."

"But I felt like today when I really started making my returns and started moving, hitting shots more effectively, it didn't matter I was down two sets."

Agassi fell behind because he was serving ineffectively and couldn't find a rhythm on Siemerink's scizzing serve-and-volley style.

"He doesn't give you a lot of looks at finding your rhythm," Agassi said. "You can hit a normal rally shot and the next thing you know you are sprinting and having to hit a target of inches. So if you start off bad, sometimes it can get away from you."

But Agassi got his chance with a break in the first game of the third set and the momentum shifted in his favour.

"He was hurting me with his second serve into the body forehand, but when I broke him for the first time in the third set, I felt like I started getting on his serve a lot better," Agassi said. "Once I was sitting there returning serve, feeling like I am going to win the point, then it started going positively."

Siemerink agreed. "It was the first time he was up in the match and it is where it changes a little bit. I could feel that he stepped up to another level of playing tennis. There was something he could do and I couldn't."

Agassi forced a fifth set as Siemerink helplessly watched a topspin lob win-

ner fall inside the baseline for the lone break in the fourth game.

Agassi broke in the opening game as the Dutchman double-faulted at break point. The American held for a 5-3 lead and then went up 0-40 on Siemerink's serve.

The Dutchman erased two match points with a pair of volley winners before Agassi hit a searing cross-court backhand service return winner to complete the win.

Siemerink also lost after building a two-set lead against Jim Courier on Friday. But he didn't feel he gave the match away.

"I played good tennis again and he changed his level during the match and I couldn't. These guys have been number one in the world. Not everybody can be number one in the world. That is clear."

"And the thing was, against Courier and against Agassi, I started off really well, played some good tennis. But these guys were able to pick up their games after two sets. And maybe the best of five is tougher for me to win."

Stark replaced Courier, who after Agassi's win was reported to have suffered a right thigh strain during his Sunday morning workout.

Jordan scores 37 as Bulls clinch homecourt advantage

ORLANDO (R) — Michael Jordan scored 37 points as the Chicago Bulls clinched homecourt advantage throughout the playoffs with a 110-94 win over the Orlando Magic Sunday, their 10th victory in 11 games.

The Bulls (65-10) could theoretically finish tied with the Utah Jazz but own the tiebreaker edge.

The value of homecourt was shown last season when Chicago won all 10 of its home playoff games en route to its fourth NBA title in six years.

Scottie Pippen scored 21 points and Jason Caffey added 14 for Chicago, which never trailed and swept the three-game season series from Orlando. The Bulls have beaten the Magic 10 straight times.

"I thought we played as good of a basketball game as we can play with the personnel on the floor today," said Bulls coach Phil Jackson. "Michael and Scottie both carried the action quite well."

Penny Hardaway and Rony Seikaly had 23 points each for Orlando, which has lost five of its last six games.

Chicago went on a 21-4 tear to start the third quarter. Jordan scored 13 points in the burst, including a 15-footer that gave the Bulls their largest lead at 74-54 with 6:33 remaining in the period.

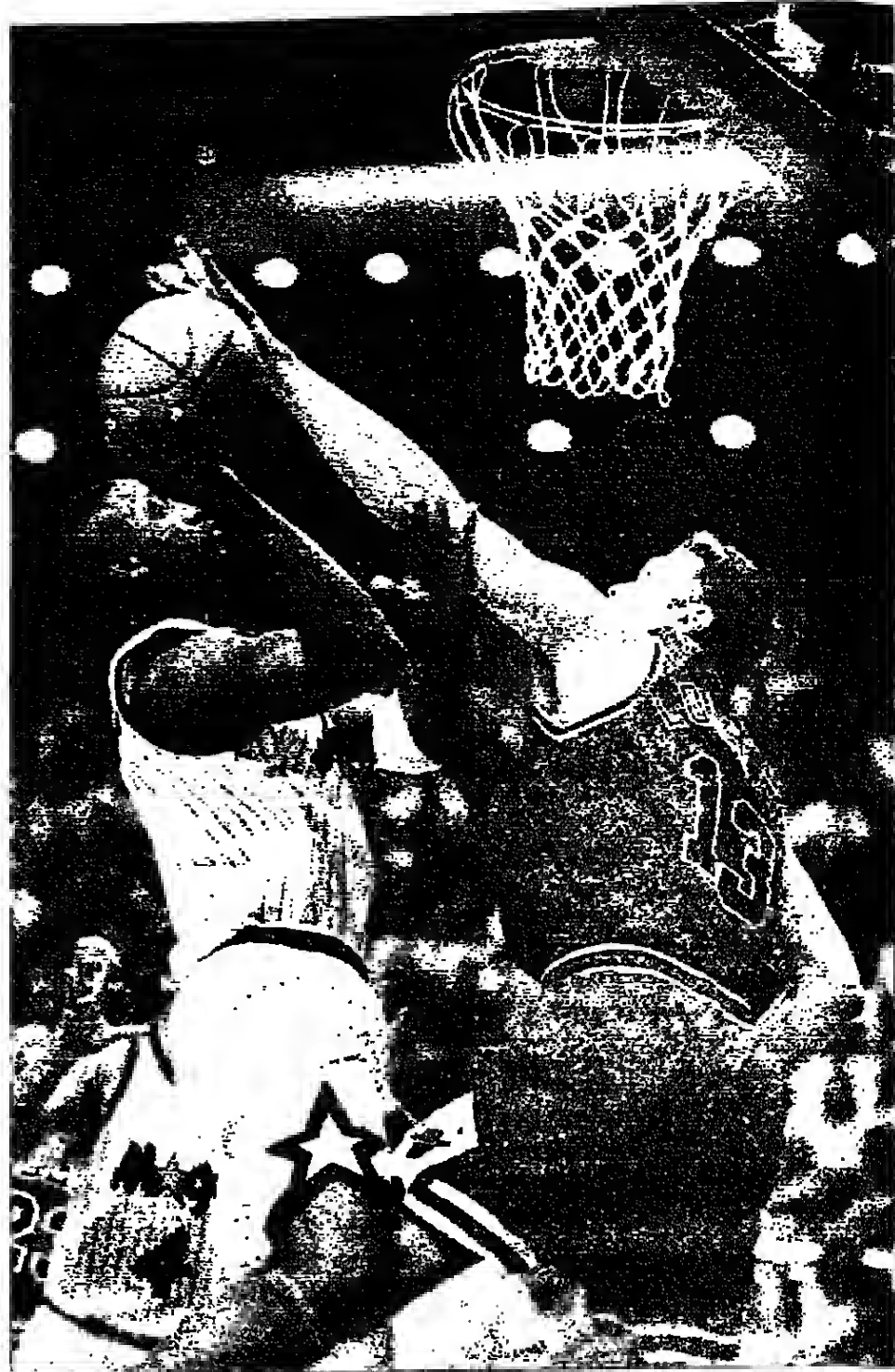
"We came out in the third quarter with a statement to try and take control of the game and see if we can pull them back on their heels, which we did," said Jordan.

"I came out a little aggressive and took advantage of some opportunities. As my shot started to feel good, I suddenly got in a great rhythm."

"That's the hand you're dealt when he's on the court," said Seikaly. "You think that he's having a quiet night and all of a sudden, he turns it on. And everybody around him looks like they're in slow motion or little kids."

In Sacramento, Mitch Richmond scored 27 points as the Kings snapped their six-game losing streak with a 113-101 victory over the Seattle SuperSonics.

Corliss Williamson added 19 points for the Kings, who won for just the second time in 15 games and remained four games behind the Clippers for the eighth and final Western Conference



Chicago Bulls center Luc Longley (R) blocks the shot by Orlando Magic guard Anfernee Hardaway, during first quarter NBA action. The Magic and Bulls met in the Orlando Arena. Chicago defeated Orlando 110-94 (Reuters photo)

playoff spot.

Gary Payton scored 19 points to lead the Sonics. All-star forward Shawn Kemp started after being held out of the starting lineup the previous four games for disciplinary reasons.

At New Jersey, Terry Devere scored eight of his 15 points in a fourth-quarter burst that rallied the resurgent Los Angeles Clippers to a 103-96 victory over the Nets in the finale of their seven-game road trip.

Loy Vaught scored 20 points and Rodney Rogers added 16 for the Clippers, who finished their road trip 3-4 with three straight wins.

At Golden State, Karl Malone shook off a sluggish first half to score 15 points in the third quarter and finish with 30 as the Utah Jazz posted their 12th straight win, defeating the Warriors 114-100.

Greg Ostertag added 21

for the Jazz, who have won eight straight road games and snapped the Warriors' three-game winning streak. Utah has a six-game lead over Seattle for homecourt advantage throughout the Western playoffs.

At Los Angeles, Derek Fisher, playing in place of the injured Nick Van Exel, scored a season-high 21 points and the Dallas Mavericks set an NBA single-quarter record for offensive futility in the Lakers' 87-80 victory.

Dallas scored just two points in the third quarter on a pair of free throws by Derek Harper with 1:51 left. It broke the previous NBA low of four points, set in 1972 by the Buffalo Braves and equaled in 1987 by the Sacramento Kings.

The Mavs missed all 15 of their shots in the period and committed nine turnovers.

NBA RESULTS

LA Clippers	103	New Jersey	96
Houston	94	Vancouver	85
Indiana	94	Minnesota	83
Chicago	110	Orlando	94
Utah	114	Golden State	100
Sacramento	113	Seattle	101
Dallas	87	LA Lakers	80

In Boston, Chris Webber recorded 31 points, 13 rebounds and nine assists as the Washington Bullets claimed sole possession of the eighth and final playoff berth in the Eastern Conference with a 120-114 victory over the Celtics.

Jiwan Howard added 31 points, eight rebounds and six assists, while Gheorghe Muresan had 17 points and 12 boards for Washington, which has won seven of its last eight games to take a half-game lead over the Cleveland Cavaliers.

At Minnesota, Rik Smits had 27 points and 11 rebounds as the Indiana Pacers scored a 94-83 win over the Timberwolves, who could have clinched their first playoff berth with a win.

Antonio Davis scored 17 points and Reggie Miller added 16 for Indiana, which remained two games behind Washington in the race for the final playoff berth in the Eastern Conference.

In Vancouver, Charles Barkley scored 28 points and grabbed 13 rebounds as the Houston Rockets won for the sixth time in their last seven games, 94-83 over the Grizzlies.

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EUROPEAN SOCCER

Milan crash 6-1 in week of shock home defeats

LONDON (R) — Shock home defeats were the order of the weekend with AC Milan's club record 6-1 loss to Juventus in the San Siro the most spectacular. Manchester United fell 3-2 at Old Trafford to derby while Liverpool slumped 2-1 at Anfield to relegation-threatened Coventry.

Following is a summary of the action from the major European leagues this weekend.

Italy

Milan slumped to their biggest league defeat ever — 6-1 at home to Juventus. Their previous heaviest losses were 5-1 to Genoa in the 1950s and 5-1 to Fiorentina way back in the 1930s.

Yugoslav Vladimir Jugovic and newly capped Italian international Christian Vieri scored twice each. France's Zinedine Zidane and Nicola Amoruso scored Juve's other goals in a brilliant team display.

Milan fans demonstrated their anger against coach Arrigo Sacchi by gathering under the directors' box and yelling "sack him".

The astonishing result took Juve six points clear at the top of Serie A from Parma, who enjoyed an impressive 3-0 defeat of Sampdoria.

Internazionale could manage only a goalless draw at Fiorentina and stay third, level on points with Bologna, who beat Reggiana 3-2.

England

Manchester United threw the championship wide open again by slumping to a 3-2 home defeat by humble derby, for whom 20-year-old Costa Rican Paulo Wanchep scored a wonderful individual goal on his English debut.

But Liverpool wasted the chance to knock United off the top spot when they lost 2-1 at home to relegation-threatened Coventry on Sunday despite taking the lead through England striker Robbie Fowler.

Victory would have taken Liverpool back to the top of the table for the first time since January.

Dutch forward Dennis Bergkamp and England striker Ian Wright were on target as Arsenal won 3-0 at Chelsea to rekindle their title ambitions.

Germany

Bayern Munich cast aside their internal problems with a 3-0 victory at Hamburg on Saturday to stay three points clear at the top of the table.

Goals from Jurgen Klinsmann and Mario Basler, both at the centre of controversy after being substituted last weekend, set the Bavarians on their way.

But Borussia Dortmund kept up the pressure by beating Bochum 2-0 thanks to two goals from Swiss striker Stephane Chapuisat. Third-placed Bayer Leverkusen lost 1-0 at Hansa Rostock and fourth-placed VfB Stuttgart managed only a 1-1 draw at bottom club Freiburg.

Spain

Barcelona saw their hopes of taking Spain's second champions' league place boosted when they moved two points clear of third-placed Real Betis.

While Barcelona brushed past Sporting Gijon, routing them 4-0, Betis conceded a late equaliser in the 2-2 home draw with Racing Santander. The result means the Catalans move to within six points of Real Madrid who face Compostela on Monday. Deportivo Coruna are a point behind Betis after squeezing a 1-0 win out of Zaragoza on Sunday.

France

Monaco opened up a commanding 12-point lead after cruising to a 2-0 victory over Lille while nearest rivals PSG were held to a 1-1 draw at home to Rennes.

Nigeria's Viktor Ikpeba and midfielder Sylvain Legwinski scored for Monaco in what proved to be a gentle warm-up for Tuesday's UEFA Cup semifinal first leg against Italy's Internazionale.

Strasbourg lost in Nancy 2-0 while Nantes, now unbeaten in their last 25 matches, drew 1-1 with Marseille. Nantes and Strasbourg are on 53 points, two points behind PSG whose title bid appears to be on the rocks.

Netherlands

Leaders PSV Eindhoven drew 2-2 away against Nac Breda but stayed top as second-placed Feyenoord also drew — 0-0 against Vitesse Arnhem.

Both sides have 59 points but PSV have a far superior goal difference. Third-placed Twente Enschede trail by four points while Ajax stay fourth on 48 after beating Volendam 3-0 away despite having Finland's Jari Litmanen sent off.

Portugal

Brazil's Mario Jardel of Brazil scored twice in Porto's 3-0 home win over Espinho as his team opened up a 10-point lead.

In Saturday's big match an early goal by captain Joao Pinto gave Benfica a 1-0 home victory over Sporting. With nine games to go Porto have 63 points, followed by Sporting on 53 and Benfica on 47.

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TRUMP COUP TOMMY GOES EUROPEAN

North-South vulnerable. East is declarer. West performs miracles at the table.

It was Tommy's lucky night. The first hand he played involved a 6-0 trump division and, as usual, Tommy was at his sparkling best. He had arrived at four hearts on the auction and West's double was a sure indicator that trumps were not going to behave kindly.

West led a low diamond, suggesting that the defender was void in clubs. Tommy won in hand with the ace, crossed to the king of diamonds, then cashed three top spades, discarding the table's remaining diamond. After ruffing a diamond low, declarer led a club from the table and ruffed with the ace as West passed with a spade. A spade ruff in dummy brought declarer's trick total to eight and produced the unusual position where declarer and West held nothing but trumps, while dummy and East had only clubs.

A club was led from dummy and ruffed in the closed hand with the ten. West overruled with the queen and returned the five of trumps, taken by declarer's eight. Tommy now looked West in with a low spade, and then West was so way West could prevent Tommy from scoring the jack of hearts for the fulfilling trick!

Opening lead: Five of ♣

The club had prepared a special event. A selection of hands from the 1995-1996 European Championship was included in the regular boards for the Tuesday night duplicate. One of the extras was the Trump Coup Tommy, who, as our readers know, is at best an average player except in one case: When trumps break badly.

WEST EAST
♠ 10 7 3
♥ 8 9
♦ 8 7 6 5 2
♣ 4 3 2

WEST EAST
♠ 10 7 3
♥ 8 9
♦ 8 7 6 5 2
♣ 4 3 2

WEST EAST
♠ 10 7 3
♥ 8 9
♦ 8 7 6 5 2
♣ 4 3 2

WEST EAST
♠ 10 7 3
♥ 8 9
♦ 8 7 6 5 2
♣ 4 3 2

WEST EAST
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♦ 8 7 6 5 2
♣ 4 3 2

WEST EAST
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WEST EAST
♠ 10 7 3
♥ 8 9
♦ 8 7 6 5 2
♣ 4 3 2

Jordan takes on UAE today in opening match of Group 3 World Cup qualifiers

By Aileen Bannayan
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

JORDAN FACES the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the opening match of the Group 3 Asian World Cup qualifiers which kick off Tuesday in Manama, Bahrain.

The Kingdom's team will be playing hosts Bahrain April 14 in their other first round/first leg Group 3 matches. The second leg of the qualifiers will start in Sharjah, UAE, April 19 with only the group winner qualifying to the second round.

The Kingdom's team had arrived in Manama Friday and trained in searing 30 degree heat and 90 per cent humidity in the Bahraini capital.

Team players and officials were in high spirits hoping to qualify to the second round for the first time in the Kingdom's history.

This will be the fourth time Jordan plays in World Cup qualifying matches after taking part in first round qualifiers for Mexico 96, Italy 90 and USA 94.

A win against the UAE in the opening match Tuesday would undoubtedly give the team a valuable boost and might determine their chances in the qualifiers.

However, doing just that is not expected to be an easy task as the UAE is Asia's second ranked team and had previously reached the World Cup finals in 1990.

Coach Mohammad Awad said he believed Group 3 teams are very close and that the Kingdom's team stood a good chance at the qualifiers although both opponents are experienced and have prepared well.

However, he said results of both opponents in friendly matches should not be a measure of the forms and chances of the three teams.

Against the Iraqi team Jordan twice lost 1-0 in Baghdad while both matches against Syria ended in goalless draws.

The Kingdom's only wins were 2-0 and 4-1 in Muscat. The team's training camps and preparations cost the JSF over JD 60,000.

Thirty-six Asian countries will contest the first round World Cup qualifiers and have been divided into ten groups. Some groups have already begun their qualifiers.

Group 1: Saudi Arabia,



Bahrain beat Nepal 9-0 in their latest match. Earlier, they beat Bangladesh 2-1 and lost 3-1 to Kuwait.

Group 2: Iran, Syria, Maldives, Kyrgyzstan.

Group 3: United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Bahrain.

Group 4: Japan, Oman, Nepal, Macao.

Group 5: Uzbekistan, Indonesia, Yemen, Cambodia.

Group 6: South Korea, Thailand, Hong Kong.

Group 7: Kuwait, Lebanon, Singapore.

Group 8: China, Turkmenistan, Vietnam, Tajikistan.

Group 9: Iraq, Pakistan, Kazakhstan.

Group 10: Qatar, India, Sri Lanka, Philippines.

The 10 groups winners will qualify for the second round where the teams will be divided into two groups.

The first two from each group will then contest the Asian finals.

The first three qualify directly for the 1998 World Cup in France while the winner of a play-off between the fourth team and the Oceania Zone winner will also qualify.

FIFA referees for the Group 3 qualifiers represent

Saudi Arabia, Syria, China, Yemen, Oman, Turkmenistan and Kuwait.

Jordan Soccer Federation (JSF) Deputy Chairman Saleh Al-Shaidat and Secretary-General Hisham Asfour head Jordan's 31-member delegation which includes nine officials including referee Dahham Eqlat, team manager Abdullahi Abdul Majid, coaches Mohammad Awad and Adnan Masud, goalkeepers' coach Basem Tayyem, and physiotherapist Hussein Atallah.

The Kingdom's initial lineup includes Mu'taz Rishen, Yousef Ammouri, Mohammad Mahadin, Amjad Taher, Hussein Shannineh, Faisal Ibrahim, Subhi Suleiman, Jamal Abu Abed, Adnan Awad, Nari Yada, Jiryes Tadros and Badran Shaqran. The team also includes Ahmad Abu Nasouh, Mohammad Abu Daoud, Mohammad Khaz'ali, Abdallah Abu Zame'h, Isam Mahmoud, Munir, Abu Hantash, Bassam Al Khatib, Ahmad Khalil, Ja'far-Hammad and Hassoun Sheikh.

Group 1: Saudi Arabia,

Group 2: Iran, Syria, Maldives, Kyrgyzstan.

Group 3: United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Bahrain.

Group 4: Japan, Oman, Nepal, Macao.

Group 5: Uzbekistan, Indonesia, Yemen, Cambodia.

Group 6: South Korea, Thailand, Hong Kong.

Group 7: Kuwait, Lebanon, Singapore.

Group 8: China, Turkmenistan, Vietnam, Tajikistan.

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Group 10: Qatar, India, Sri Lanka, Philippines.

The 10 groups winners will qualify for the second round where the teams will be divided into two groups.

The first two from each group will then contest the Asian finals.

The first three qualify directly for the 1998 World Cup in France while the winner of a play-off between the fourth team and the Oceania Zone winner will also qualify.

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JORDAN'S WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS RECORD

JORDAN'S NATIONAL TEAM first took part in the World Cup qualifiers in 1986. The team has never made it past the first round, however, officials hope that the four-month training camp and eight friendlies in the past months have given the players and coach the best preparation ever. Jordan's record in past first round qualifiers includes 5 wins, 4 draws and 9 defeats in a total of 18 matches.

Here's a brief look at Jordan's past participations in World Cup qualifiers:

Mexico 1986

The team's only win was over Qatar in the opening match. Jordan lost the other three matches and the scoring record was 3-7 in their opponents' favour.

Jordan-Qatar	1-0
Qatar-Jordan	2-0
Iraq-Jordan	3-2
Iraq-Jordan	2-0

Italy 1990

Jordan's only wins were over Oman. One match ended in a draw and Jordan lost the other three. The scoring record was 5-7.

Qatar-Jordan	1-0
Jordan-Qatar	1-1
Iraq-Jordan	1-0
Iraq-Jordan	4-0
Jordan-Oman	2-0
Jordan-Oman	2-0

USA 1994

The Kingdom's two wins were over Pakistan. Jordan drew in three and lost three matches. The scoring record was 12-15.

Jordan-Yemen	1-1
Jordan-Iraq	1-1
China-Jordan	3-0
Jordan-Pakistan	3-1
Jordan-Yemen	1-1
Iraq-Jordan	4-0
China-Jordan	4-1
Jordan-Pakistan	5-0

TV coverage of Group 3 matches

First leg in Bahrain

Jordan — UAE	April 8	5:15 p.m.
Bahrain — UAE	April 11	5:15 p.m.
Bahrain — Jordan	April 14	5:15 p.m.

Second leg in Sharjah

Bahrain — Jordan	April 19	5:00 p.m.
UAE — Bahrain	April 22	5:00 p.m.
UAE — Jordan	April 26	5:00 p.m.

Sorrento drives in Seattle's winning run over Boston; A's beat Yankees

SEATTLE (R) — Paul Sorrento singled in Alex Rodriguez with the winning run in the 10th inning as the Seattle Mariners rallied for an 8-7 victory over the Boston Red Sox Sunday, salvaging the finale of the three-game series.

Rodriguez, who homered earlier in the game and had four hits, reached on an infield single and went to second on a wild pitch by Rick Rlrick (1-1).

Ken Griffey was intentionally walked and both runners were sacrificed by Rich Amaral. Jay Buhner was intentionally walked to load the bases.

Sorrento lined a 1-1 pitch into right, and Rodriguez trotted home with his fourth run of the game. Edgar Martinez had hit a two-run single and Sorrento a two-run double in the eighth to give the Mariners a 7-5 lead.

John Wasdin, acquired in the trade for Jose Canseco, allowed four runs and four hits over seven innings in his Boston debut, including Rodriguez's homer in the fourth and a two-run homer by Griffey, his fifth, in the sixth. Wasdin walked two and struck out a career-high nine batters.

In Anaheim, Brian Giles and sandy Alomar homered in the ninth off closer Troy Percival (0-2) as the Cleveland Indians overcame

a six-run deficit for a 10-8 victory over the Angels in the rubber game of their three-game series.

In Chicago, Jaime Navarro struck out a career-high 11 batters over seven shutout innings and Tony Phillips and Chris Snopce each hit solo homers as the White Sox defeated the

Detroit Tigers 5-3. Al Minnesota, Mike Sweeney homered and drove in a career-high four runs as Glendon Rusch won his Major-League debut and the Kansas Royals routed the twins 12-2.

In Oakland, Dave Telgheder and two relievers combined on a shutout as

the Athletics scored all their runs on eighth-inning errors by third baseman Wade Boggs and first baseman Tino Martinez to defeat the

New York Yankees 3-0. In Texas, Rusty Greer had four hits, including an RBI double in a four-run first inning, as the Rangers

pounded Mike Mussina (0-1) for seven runs and handed the Baltimore Orioles their first loss of the season, 9-3.

MAJOR LEAGUE RESULTS

American League			
Milwaukee	4	Toronto	2
White Sox	5	Detroit	3
Kansas City	12	Minnesota	2

Inter-faith dialogue starts in Amman

By Francesca Ciriaci
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A further step forward in inter-faith dialogue and inter-religious understanding was made on Monday here with the starting of consultations between representatives from the Evangelical Church of Germany and key-figures from Muslim and Christian Arab communities and organisations.

More than 50 scholars, politicians, and clergymen from Egypt, Germany, Iraq, Jordan, Britain, and Palestine are engaged in a three-day discussion on "Religion and Secularism," organised by the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilisation Research — Al Bait Foundation — and aimed at overcoming divisions and prejudices.

"The dialogue between Christianity and Islam comes as a result of the dialogue among different Christian confessions which started with the ecumenical councils of the twentieth century," said one of the German speakers, the Rev. Andreas Feldtkeller.

Echoing the expectations of most fellow participants, Dr. Feldtkeller, who also teaches science of mission at the prestigious Heidelberg University, said "the conference will help reach a better understanding between Muslims and Christians on their respective views on secularism and find out what can be done together."

Addressing the opening session, President of the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilisation Research — Al Bait Foundation — Nassereldine Assad said one of the main objectives of the consultations is to exchange views and historic experiences on secularism and religion in Islam and Christianity.

The conference should also identify the "contemporary and future challenges" facing religious institutions in changing societies, Dr. Assad said.

In Germany, unemployment and socially and economically difficult circumstances have posed a serious challenge to the churches, and often resulted in xeno-

phobia and Islamophobia, said Head of the Ecumenical Relations and Ministries Abroad Unit at the Office of the Evangelical Church in Germany, Bishop Rolf Koppe.

"Discriminations, xenophobia and anti-Muslim attitudes are not the general feature of our society, but they are still a challenge," he told the conference.

In a bid to contribute to the establishment of a pluralistic society, the German churches have recently issued a common declaration on solidarity and social peace, said Bishop Koppe.

The official English translation of the declaration will be available next month, he added.

In Monday sessions, Christian and Muslim scholars presented and discussed papers on secularism and its relation with the state.

Today's Western and increasingly secular culture is not the "time without religion" which theologians and social scientists have prophesied, but it is "full of religion which mainly has risen not within the established churches," said Professor of Theology at Munich Military University, Gottfried Kuenzlen.

"The religious point of view is not adopted by education, by a given tradition or by inherited patterns of culture, but by individual choice," Prof. Kuenzlen said.

"Esoteric and occultism, astrology, belief in ghosts, Red Indian, German, Indian, Chinese, Tibetan fragments of religion — all this is mixed up."

In this time of "religious pluralism," "Christianity has lost its religious monopoly...and its cultural position as the dominating religion in Europe," Prof. Kuenzlen concluded.

Recalling the final documents of the General Conference of the Secular Movement held in Beirut in autumn 1982, Professor of Shari'a at Yarmouk University Faruk Samarra'i said "hostility to religion is utterly unrelated to secularism."

"In fact, it runs counter to the values of secularism," intended as "a comprehensive outlook to the... entire

humanity and the whole universe, thus emphasising the complete independence of the world with all its components, dimensions and values and separating them from those of religion."

Regardless to its different interpretations, however, (be it with or against religion), "it would be naturally impossible to have any affinity between secularism and Islam in any way," Prof. Samarra'i maintained.

"Because the sum total of a true believer's activity in this life completely aims at worshipping God and seeking His pleasure."

In today's sessions, discussions will focus on "current challenges within the framework of the relation between religion and secularism, to Islam and Christianity."

Among the Jordanian participants in the conference are: Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Abdul Salam Abadi; Senator Abdul Aziz Khayyat; Senator and Chairman of the Executive Bureau of the World Muslim Congress for Jerusalem Kamel Shareef; President of AL al Bait University Mohammad Bakht; Director General of the Abdul Hamid Shoman Foundation Ibrahim Izzeddin; President of the Institute of Diplomacy Mazen Armouti; Editor in Chief of Al-Urdun weekly Musa Keilani; Secretary General of Al Wa'ed Party Anis Muasher; and Chairman of the Arab Orthodox Society Ra'ouf Abu Jaber.

His Royal Highness Prince Zeid Ben Ra'd chaired the opening session on behalf of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, under whose patronage the consultations are being held.

A number of students and youth is also attending the conference.

"The Crown Prince always urges us to meet with all categories of society, hence, this conference gathers philosophers, lawyers, clergymen and, above all, youth, who are meant to interact and confront their views with the academics to enrich this dialogue," Dr. Assad said.



The three Lebanese detained by Israel for 12 years, Muhammad Hazime, Jaafar Hraish and Nehme Bazzi (from right to left), arrive at the Hizbullah office in Beirut, on Monday, after they were released in a Red Cross-supervised prisoner exchange for a pro-Israeli militiaman. This was the second such swap this year under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) between the pro-Iranian Muslim Shiite Hizbullah and the pro-Israel South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia (AFP photo)

Thousands of Palestinians face expulsion from East Jerusalem

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Tens of thousands of Palestinian residents of Arab East Jerusalem are threatened with exile from the city under a systematic deportation campaign by the Israeli government, Israeli civil liberties groups charged on Monday.

A report released by the Israeli groups B'tselem and Hamoked said several thousand Palestinians had received notices since the start of the year revoking their permits to reside in the annexed eastern sector of Jerusalem.

In all, 50,000 to 80,000 Palestinians could be targeted by what the group's called Israel's "quiet deportation" programme.

"Who needs to charter planes or buses or bring in army trucks? The Israeli government is carrying out mass deportations slowly, quietly, systematically," said Yuval Givbar, a B'tselem official, at a Jerusalem press conference.

The report said that from 1967 to 1994 Israel routinely renewed residency permits of Palestinian residents who travelled to live or work in other countries.

"Only a stay of seven consecutive years abroad, without visits to Israel, was liable to result in the revocation of resident status," the report said.

But 18 months ago, the interior ministry, relying on what the report called a broader interpretation of the law, began to revoke residency permits regardless of the time spent living outside of the city.

"All Palestinians who have lived outside of Jerusalem for a period of time, whether in a foreign country, in another part of the West Bank, or in Jerusalem's suburbs just metres outside the municipal borders are liable to lose their rights as Jerusalem residents,"

the report said.

"The details of this policy remain unknown and it is unclear how much time a Palestinian must spend abroad before the interior ministry informs the person that he or she is no longer a resident of Jerusalem," it said.

While refusing to provide figures on the number of Palestinians affected by its policies, the Israeli interior ministry defends its "right" to revoke Jerusalem permits from Palestinians who have lived more than seven years outside the city limits or have received permanent resident status or citizenship from another country.

"These provisions apply equally to all permanent residents of Israel and not just to those in eastern Jerusalem," a ministry official said. "These rules have been in effect for many years and no change has been made to them recently," the official said.

But human rights group charge that the right-wing government elected to power last year has been far more aggressive than its predecessors in applying the laws.

They also note that Israel's policy of tightly restricting the number of building permits for Arab East Jerusalem Palestinians and the subsequent rise in housing costs has forced growing numbers of young Palestinians to rent homes in suburbs which do not lie inside the municipal boundaries.

This leaves them open to losing their "blue cards," the Israeli-issued residency permits which give Arab East Jerusalem Palestinians the right to work and circulate inside the Jewish state, to send their children to city schools and receive social benefits.

Suad Nimr is one of the thousands of Arab East Jerusalem residents to receive a notice since the year began

that her right to reside in the city of her birth was revoked.

"The interior ministry told me to leave the city within two weeks, even though I was born in Jerusalem, as was my husband Adnan," Ms. Nimr, 32, said Tuesday. Her blue card was recalled because she had lived for several years in Saudi Arabia.

Without the residency card, the couple's life has turned into a nightmare of clandestinity.

"We can't work and are three children can't even go to school," Ms. Nimr told a press conference organised by B'tselem and Hamoked.

"This policy makes emigrants out of Jerusalem Palestinians, many of whom never imagined that simply by moving to a nearby village they would lose their resident status," Mr. Givbar said.

"These rules also discriminate between Palestinians and Jewish residents who can live as long as they want abroad without losing their rights," he said, adding that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself lived for more than 10 years in the United States.

Interior Minister Eli Shussan defended his ministry's policy in an interview on Israel Radio Thursday, saying that by withdrawing residency cards from "ineligible" East Jerusalem residents, the state was saving some \$5 million per year in social spending.

Since it occupied East Jerusalem from Jordan in the 1967 six-day war, Israel has sought to increase the Jewish population of the sector of the city while limiting growth on the Palestinian side.

During the 30 years, authorities have granted only 600 housing permits for the 155,000 Arabs in East Jerusalem, while building 10 Jewish settlements which now house some 170,000 people.

Assad vows to free occupied lands

DAMASCUS (AFP) — Syrian President Hafez Al Assad pledged on Monday to liberate Arab lands occupied by Israel on the 50th anniversary of his Baath Party's rise to power in Syria.

"I will mobilise the nation's strengths to liberate occupied Arab lands and to reinstate trampled Arab rights, in view of a just and global peace in the Middle East," President Assad said in a speech published by the party newspaper Al Baath.

"In this struggle, we will confront the tyrannical forces that want to hurt the Arab nation, exert pressure and impose favorable conditions for the aggressor, Israel," Mr. Assad said, without identifying these forces.

Festivities were being held across Syria on Monday to mark the 50th anniversary of the Baath (renaissance) Party, which came to power in a bloodless military coup in 1963.

Colourful banners have filled the main streets in the Syrian capital for the last week, along with large portraits of President Assad hung from public buildings.

Shots of joy were also fired and rallies held in Beirut to mark the Baath Party's anniversary, as Syria maintains 35,000 troops in Lebanon and is the main foreign power broker there.

Mr. Assad said his party "expresses with sincerity the hopes of the nation."

"In the battle to free the land and to realise peace, we remain attached to our principles and we will not give up an inch of our land or any of our national rights," the Syrian president said.

In the 1967 Middle East war, Israel seized the strategic Golan Heights from Syria and Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, along with East Jerusalem.

Peace talks between Syria and Israel have been frozen for more than a year over the Golan Heights. Syria is demanding the plateau be completely returned, but Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has refused any withdrawal.

Syria on Sunday denounced the U.S. policy of maintaining Israel's military superiority in the Middle East, saying it was incompatible with the peace process.

Iraq celebrates anniversary

Baghdad celebrated Monday the 50th anniversary of the founding of the pan-Arab Baath Party, in power in Baghdad since 1968 while a rival branch has controlled Syria since 1963.

"The Baath today isn't only an Arab party but an international example to follow, and represents an intellectual, political, social and civilisation model for other people," the official Al Jumhuriya said.

According to the press, delegations from "Arab and friendly countries" will participate in the celebrations in Iraq's ministries, universities, schools and administrative offices.

The Baath Party, which held its constitutional congress in April 1947, is a secular organisation preaching Arab nationalism and socialism. Its goal is to create a "unified Arab fatherland from the (Atlantic) Ocean to the (Arab) Gulf."

The party was founded in 1941 in Syria by Syrians Michel Aflak and Salaheddin Bitar, and has "national commands" in Damascus and Baghdad and "regional commands" in other Arab countries where the party has branches.

The Baath took power in Iraq in a February 1963 coup, but was overthrown several months later. It has been in power in Iraq since it seized control again in a July 1968 coup.

Elton John's party causes chaos

LONDON (AFP) — Elton John's costumed 50th birthday party caused chaos Sunday evening with its long lines of limousines and other VIP cars as the area near one of west London's busiest intersections became gridlocked.

"Normally most people who go to this music venue arrive by public transport, but you can't really expect superstars to turn up on the tube, especially in fancy dress," said a police spokesman, after Scotland Yard urged motorists not to on Elton's guest list to find other routes. The 50-year-old rocker man stunned spectators outside

London's Hammersmith Palais when he arrived in the back of a white removal lorry, whose interior had been decked out with gilt mirrors and rich red wallpaper to look like a restoration drawing room. Hundreds of fans shrieked as the multi-millionaire wearing a towering silver wig — was gently lowered to the pavement with his friend David Furnish and two other attendants.

"The Eagles" could fly higher

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The Eagles, a country-tinged rock group from the 1970s and early 1980s, could soon have the all-time, best-selling record in the United States, the Recording Industry Association of America said. The U.S. group's 1976 release, "Their Greatest Hits (1971-1975)," has reached sales of 24 million — matching "Thriller," Michael Jackson's 1982 record that turned him into a pop superstar. Around the world, though, Jackson remains far ahead. "Thriller" has sold 46 million copies outside the United States against between nine million and 10 million for "Their Greatest Hits."

Hong Kong may host beauty contest

HONG KONG (AFP) — Hong Kong is considering hosting the Miss Universe beauty contest next year in a move aimed at boosting tourism after the territory's handover to China, it was reported Monday. The U.S.-based organiser of the Miss Universe contest has approached Hong Kong authorities asking whether the territory would host the competition in May 1997, the Chinese-language Sing Tao daily said. Hong Kong hosted the Miss Universe pageant in 1976. Sing Tao said some groups were interested in the idea in the hope that it could boost Hong Kong's tourist industry, which is expected to slow after celebrations to mark the territory's return to China on July 1.

Another rapper shot dead

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Gunfire has felled another U.S. rapper, this time in New Orleans, Louisiana. On Sunday New Orleans police confirmed that Albert Thomas, a member of the rap group Unlv, had been found shot dead at about 400 a.m. (1000 GMT) Saturday. Thomas, 22, was found by himself in a car, department spokesman Lieutenant Marlon Deffolo told AFP. The group's first record, "Unfortunately No Longer Virgins," was issued in 1993. Their latest effort, "Uptown 4 Life," was released last year. Last month, rapper Christopher Wallace known as notorious B.I.G. was gunned down by an unknown assailant while sitting in his vehicle in Los Angeles. It is unclear whether the Wallace murder is connected to last September's mysterious drive-by shooting in Las Vegas, Nevada that claimed the life of rap rival Tupac Shakur.

Oman bans Israeli firms from computer trade fair

MUSCAT (AFP) — Oman has banned Israeli companies from a computer trade fair here and reportedly refused entry to an Israeli diplomat following an Arab League call last week to freeze ties with the Jewish state.

"The authorities have asked that Israeli firms not come to the (Comex computer and communications) Fair," a Foreign Ministry official told AFP. At least five Israeli firms participated in last year's computer fair in Muscat.

The Omani government also has refused to let an Israeli diplomat join the Jewish state's trade office in Muscat opened last year in a first step towards normalising ties, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported on Monday.

Oman refused to grant visas to diplomat Nissim Ben-Shetreet and a Foreign Ministry employee who did not have diplomatic status, it said.

Asked whether Oman would eventually close the Israeli trade office, the official said "the sultanate is bound by the Arab League recommendations, which call for an end to normalisation with Israel."

The two Israelis are due to take up posts in the Israeli representative office set up in Muscat after the two countries agreed to establish commercial relations in 1996.

The Foreign Ministry official declined to confirm or deny the report.

According to Haaretz, the Israeli government fears that Qatar, the other Gulf state

which has begun normalising ties, will follow Oman's example and bar Israelis from entering the country.

Oman had taken a leading role among Arab states in normalising ties with Israel after the Jewish state signed interim peace agreements with the Palestinians in 1993 and 1995.

But both Oman and Qatar slowed down the process after the right-wing government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came to power in June.

Oman's trade representative in Tel Aviv, Mohsen Al Balushi, left Israel in January without explanation and has not been replaced.

Arab League foreign ministers voted a week ago for a freeze on normalisation with Israel and recommended that member states close all representative offices linking them to the Jewish state, though no government has yet to formally announce such a move.

The Arab League action came in the wake of Israel's decision to begin work in mid-March on a new Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem. That decision has sparked continuous violent protests in the Palestinian areas and led to a freeze in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Mubarak calls for Israeli settlement freeze

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak called on the United States Monday to impose a freeze on Israel's settlement

policy to push forward the peace process.

Mr. Mubarak, speaking as Mr. Netanyahu prepared to meet U.S. President Bill Clinton in Washington, also ruled out the possibility of Egypt cutting ties with Israel.

"If they (Americans) could manage to make Netanyahu agree to it, it will be a very good step forward and it will help us push the peace process forward," Mr. Mubarak told reporters asking him to comment on a six-month settlement freeze.

"Let them hold the settlement for the time being and in the negotiations all the problems could be solved," Mr. Mubarak said after casting his vote in Egypt's municipal elections.

The Egyptian president stressed that the thorny issue of Jerusalem could be solved "when the agreements are implemented and people are relaxed."

"I think that the Palestinians then will find a formula to be convenient for both sides," he added.

Mr. Mubarak also dismissed a proposal by Mr. Netanyahu for an intensive Camp David style summit with Mr. Clinton and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat to hammer out tough issues like the format used between Israel and Egypt in 1978 which paved the way for the first Arab-Israeli peace treaty one year later.

"A new Camp David will not solve anything in the current phase," Mr. Mubarak said.

Israel warns EU

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel has appealed to the European Union (EU) to help prevent Arab states from using a Mediterranean conference later this month in Malta to press an anti-Israel agenda, a foreign ministry official said Monday.

In a letter to his counterparts in the 15-member EU, Eitan Ben-Tzur, number two in the Israeli foreign ministry, warned "against attempts by certain Arab states to exploit the Malta conference to attack Israel," the official said on condition of anonymity.

The April 15-16 meeting aims to improve cooperation between European, North African and Middle East nations bordering the Mediterranean "and must not be based as a substitute for direct negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbours," the official said.

The official said Foreign Minister David Levy would attend the conference, rejecting reports the government could boycott the meeting due to the hostile atmosphere in the region.

Islamists win Hebron University elections

HEBRON, West Bank (AFP) — Islamist candidates won student council elections at Hebron University Monday despite a better-than-expected showing by the Fatah movement of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, student officials said.

A joint list of candidates put forward by the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and the smaller Islamic Jihad won 19 seats on the student council to 15 for Fatah and one for the left-wing Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

Hebron University is a stronghold of militants and was repeatedly closed by Israeli authorities before most of Hebron was turned over to Palestinian rule in January.

Shortly before it withdrew from most of the city, the Israeli army reopened Hebron University after a year-long closure imposed following a string of suicide bombings by Hamas and Islamic Jihad killed 58 people plus the bombers.

Previous student councils at Hebron University were made up entirely of Islamist activists, but the elections were held under a system of proportional representation this year which made it easier for other groups to elect council members.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad reject the partial peace accords signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), saying they permit the continued occupation of Palestinian lands and will not lead to statehood.

The groups have played a prominent role in violent protests the past three weeks over Israel's decision to build a new Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem.

Hamas was also blamed for a March 21 suicide bombing in Tel Aviv which killed three Israelis, while two Islamic Jihad militants died last week in botched suicide bombings targeting Jewish settlers in the Gaza Strip.

On March 24, the Islamic list won union elections among teachers and employees at Al Najah University in Nablus, beating Fatah for the first time since 1980.